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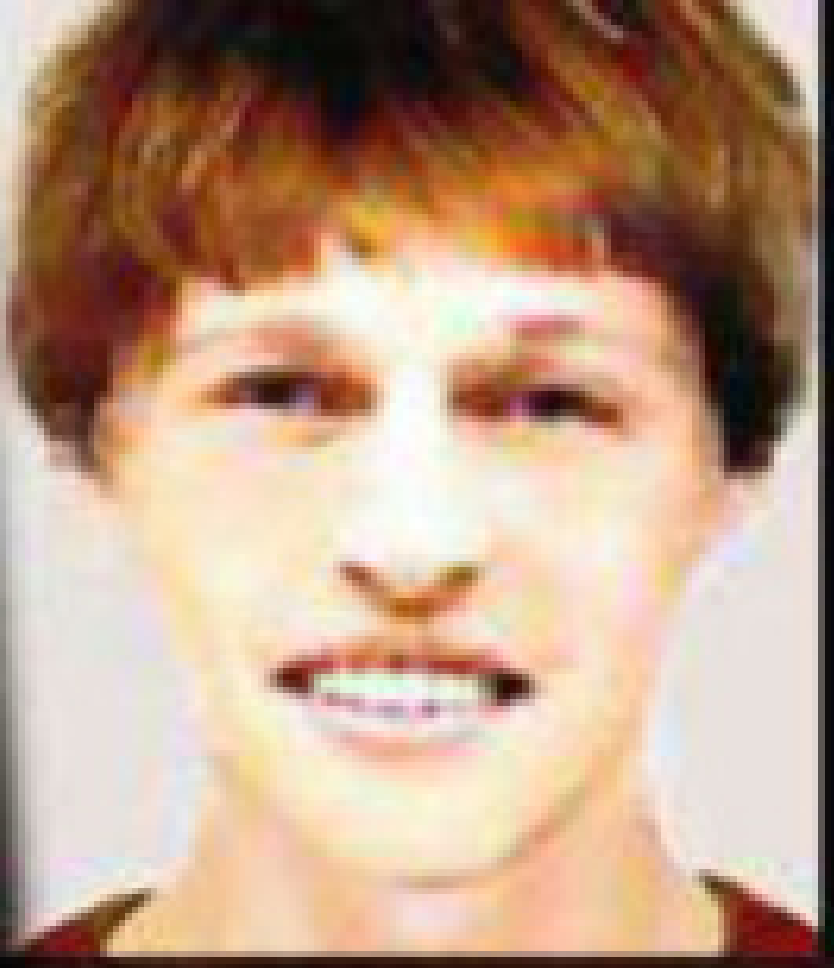
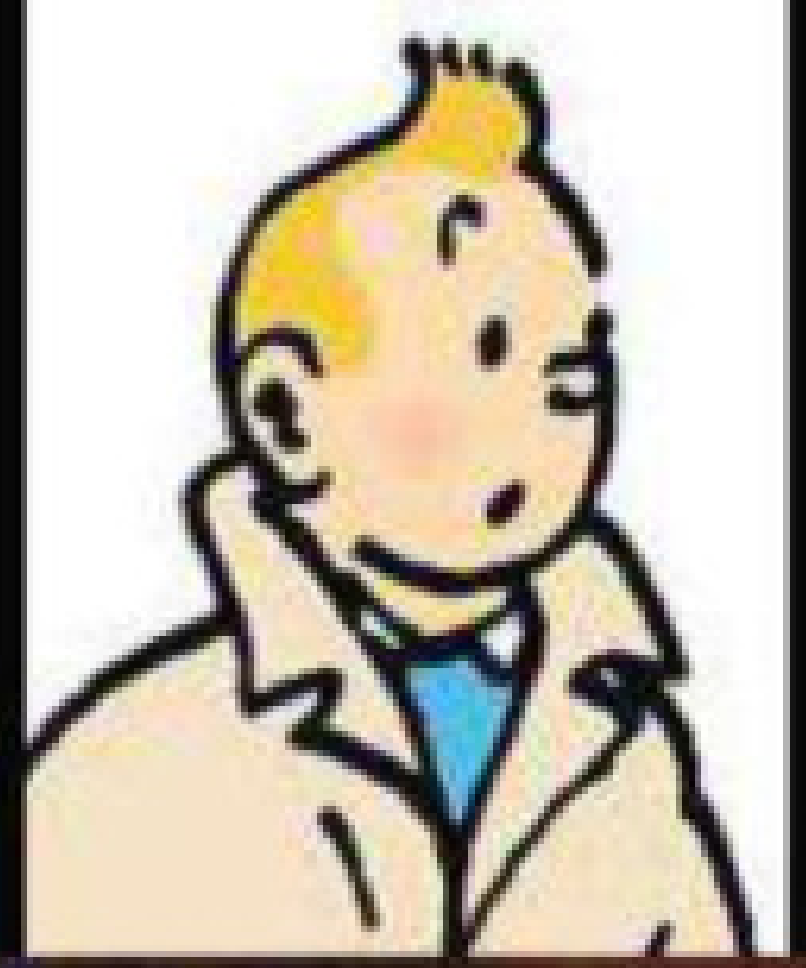
SPONTANEOUS HUMAN COMBUSTION



FOREST BOY

THE MYSTERY TEEN FROM THE GERMAN WOODS



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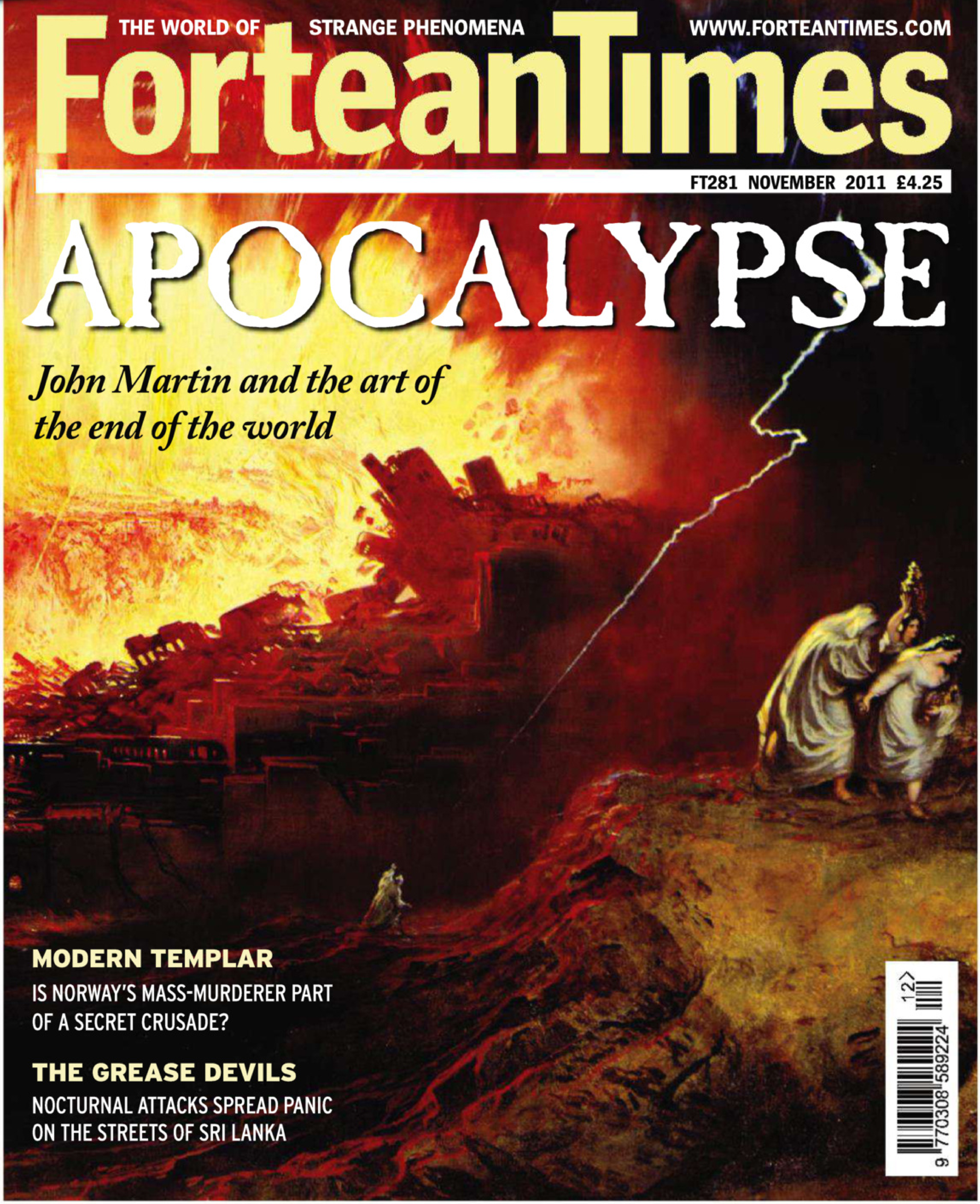

APOCALYPSE

John Martin and the art of the end of the world

MODERN TEMPLAR

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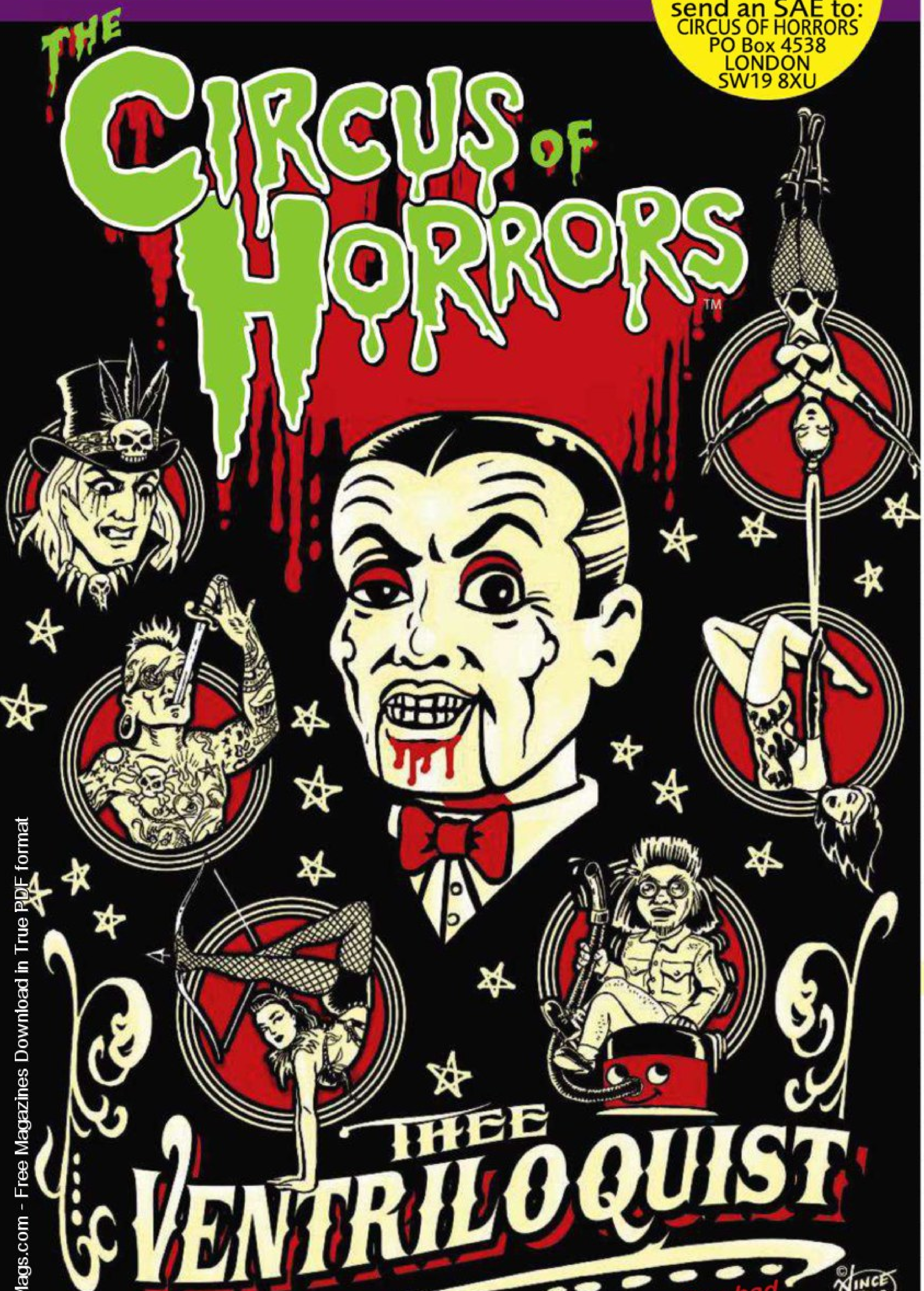

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CROYDON Fairfield Halls	**TUE 1 NOV**	020 8688 9291	www.fairfield.co.uk
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YEOVIL Octagon	**TUE 15 NOV**	01935 422 884	www.octagon-theatre.co.uk
EASTBOURNE Congress Theatre	**WED 16 NOV**	01323 412 000	www.eastbournetheatres.co.uk
NEWPORT Riverfront	**FRI 18 / SAT 19 NOV**	01633 656 757	www.newport.gov.uk/theriverfront
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AYLESBURY Waterside Theatre	**TUE 17 JAN**	0844 871 7615	www.ambassadortickets.com/Aylesbury
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IT'S BACK!

UNCON 2011

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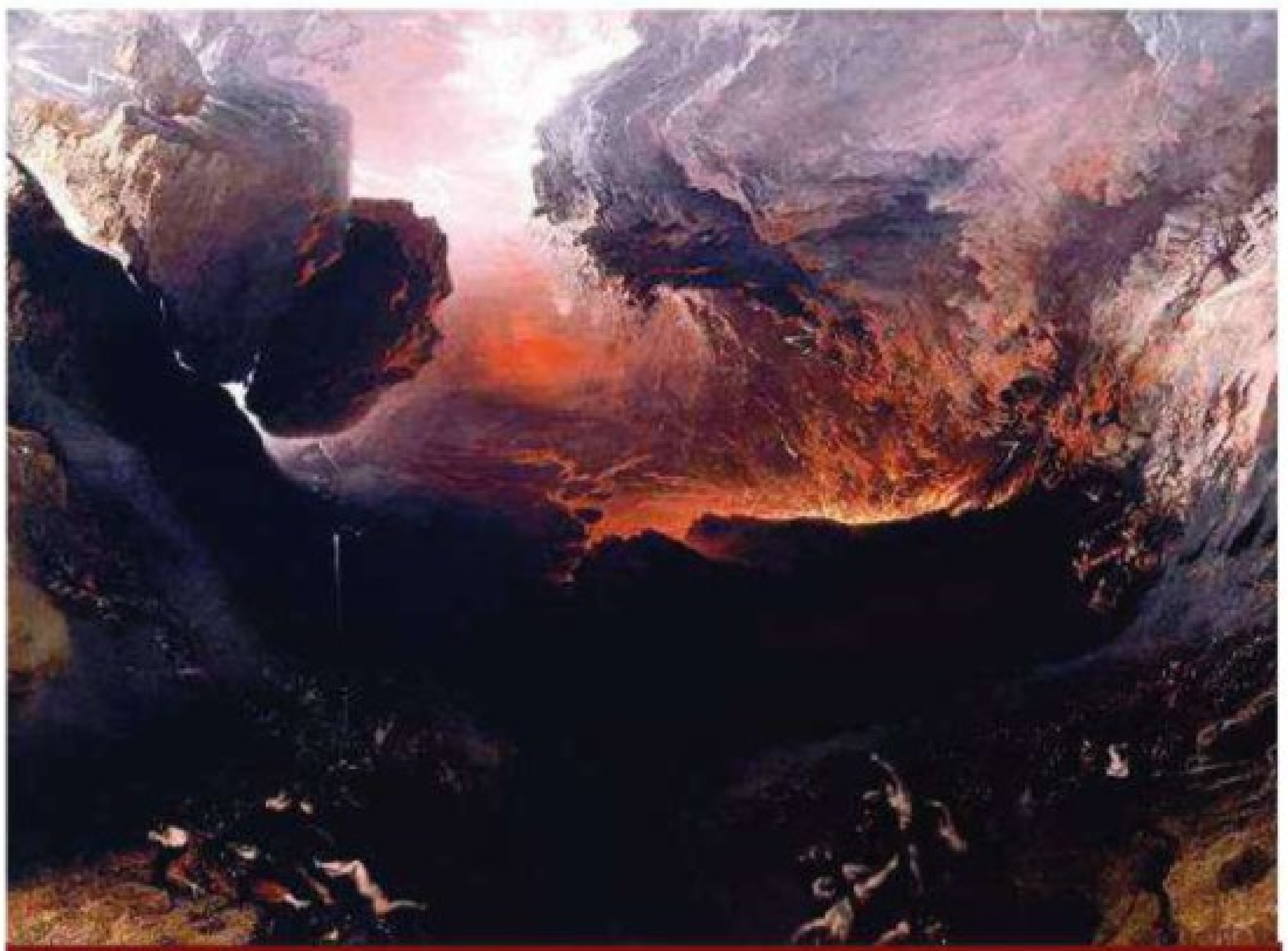
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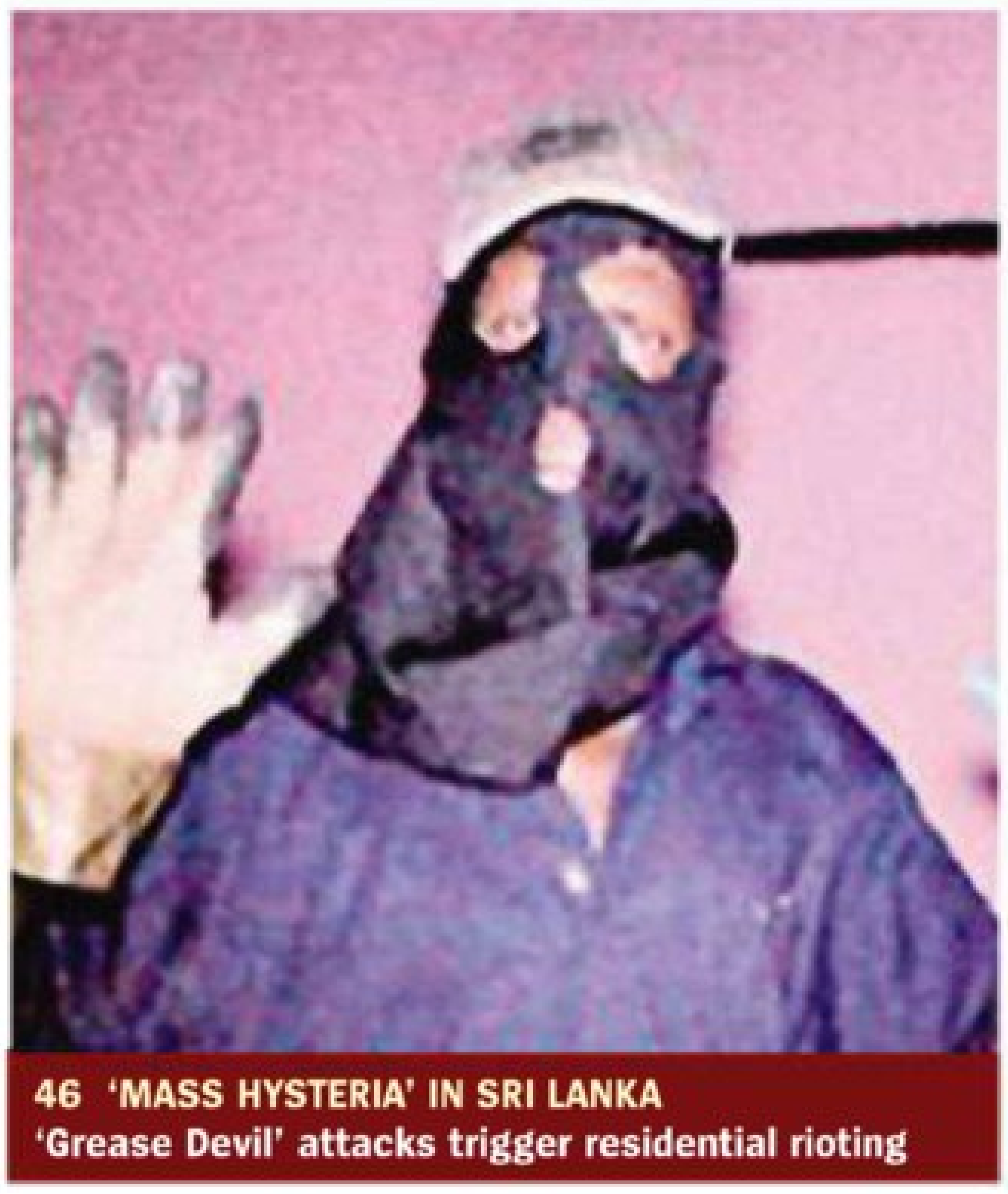

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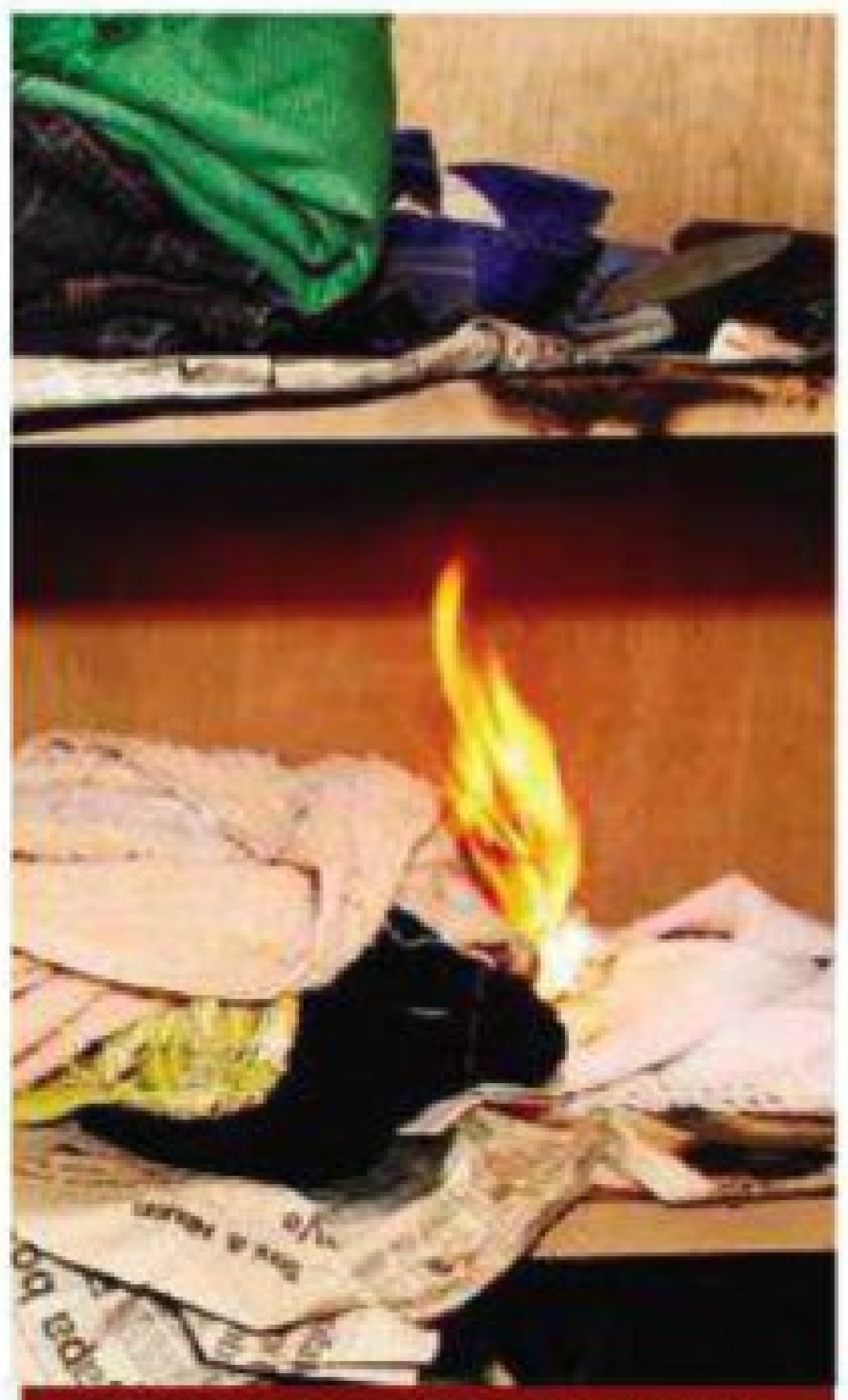
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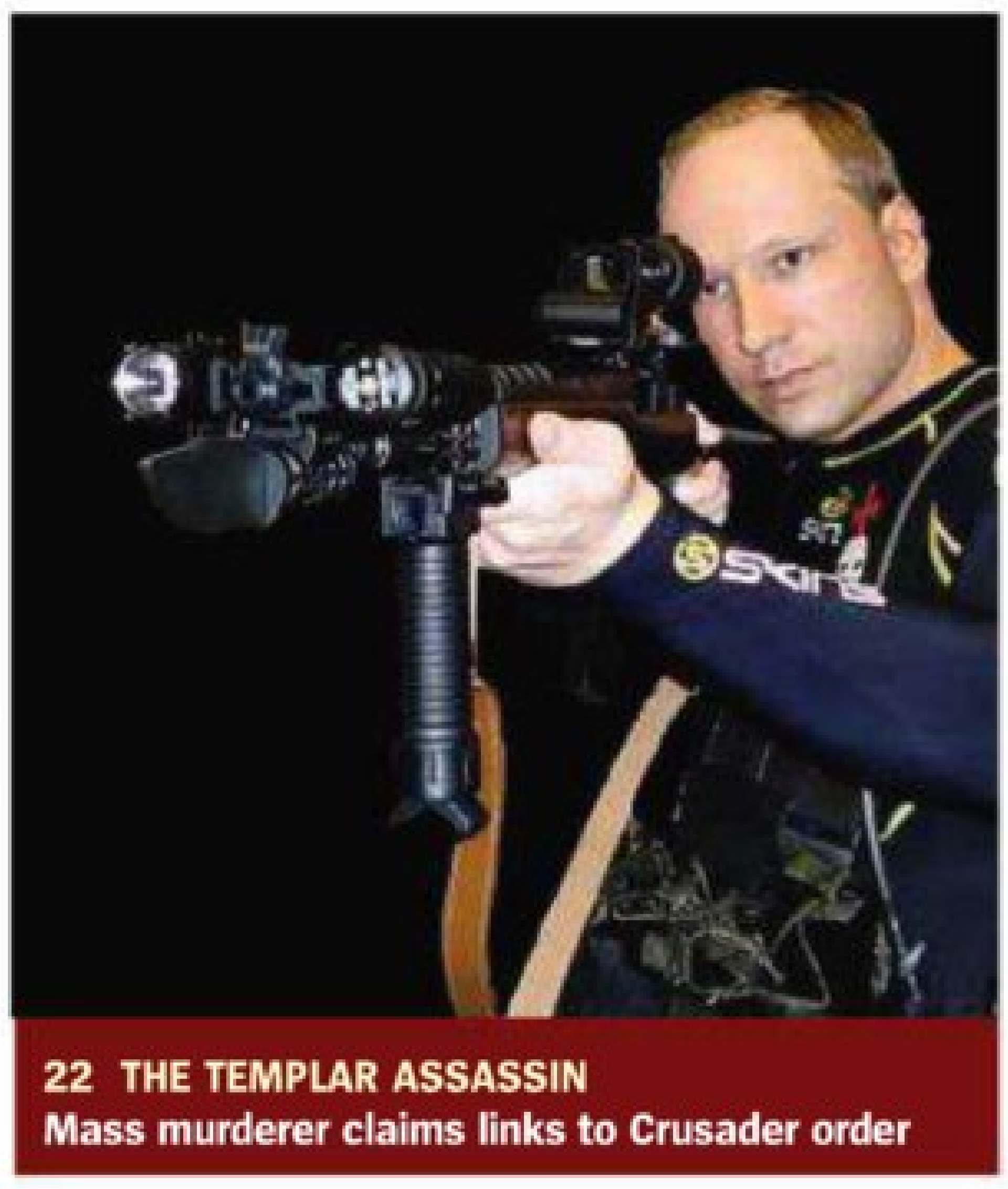
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MAIN COVER IMAGE: TATE BRITAIN
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editorial

The End of the World was nigh

The Art of Apocalypse

In this issue, we're proud to be collaborating with Tate Britain to celebrate the career of one of the country's most fascinating, if misunderstood and neglected, artists.

John Martin's vast apocalyptic canvases caused a popular sensation when they were exhibited in the Victorian era, bringing to life biblical and historical catastrophes – as well as heavenly visions – for a large and enthusiastic audience. As Martin Myrone, curator of a major new Tate Britain exhibition devoted to Martin's life and work, points out in his specially commissioned feature (pp34–39), while the artistic establishment rejected Martin's wide-screen artistic blockbusters, and their reputation has remained largely in the doldrums ever since, they were a prescient element in an emergent entertainment culture that has since given us disaster movies and science fiction epics while continuing to feed our popular apocalyptic imaginings.

"I don't care if it is still hot - you're not having it"

MARTIN ROSS

HP Lovecraft, for one, was impressed and inspired by a series of Martin mezzotints he saw in New York, writing that he "was enthralled by the darkly thunderous, apocalyptically majestic, & cataclysmically unearthly power of one who, to me, seemed to hold the essence of cosmic mystery".

We hope this issue's feature whets your appetite for this exciting exhibition, which runs until next March. For your own HPL moment, do get along to Tate Britain for a rare opportunity to see these unique works brought together.

Elsewhere in this issue, we examine a rare case of Spontaneous Human Combustion in Ireland, an outbreak of fiery poltergeist activity in Indonesia and a mass panic in Sri Lanka – and celebrate the fortean adventures of Tintin. Something for everyone, we hope you'll agree.

Doomsday rescheduled

While we're on the subject of all things apocalyptic, readers will no doubt recall that the End Times – at least according to American radio preacher Harold Camping – were supposed to have begun earlier this year, on 21 May, to be precise (**FT269:11; 277:26–27**). His predictions proved inaccurate, of course, but Mr Camping is hardly the first to have experienced such a Great Disappointment. He's also not the first would-be prophet to have subsequently revised the date of Doomsday. An undeterred Camping quickly declared that 21 May had been merely a "spiritual judgement" and that the End is now set for 21 October, which will see both the Rapture taking place and the destruction of the Earth. All of which means that this issue of *FT* may be the last you'll ever hold in your clammy, trembling hands and that those UnCon tickets you just bought will prove completely worthless…

UnConvention 2011 – and UnCon Late

If you do fancy taking a punt on us all still being here, though, we'd like to remind you that it's your last chance to book your places for this year's weekend of the weird and wonderful. We're looking forward to two packed days of talks from numerous fortean luminaries, as well as a pair of special screenings. At a bonus event on Saturday, we'll be showing the strange new Canadian film *The Wild Hunt*, in which a role-playing game gets badly out of hand, while on Sunday afternoon we'll be treated to an exclusive premiere of *Her Master's Voice*, Nina Conti's new film about her late, lamented ventriloquial mentor Ken Campbell, star of many an UnCon past. See facing page for full details and booking info.

On top of all this, we'll be running UnCon Late, a special after-show evening event, on Saturday night in a hostelry just round the corner from UnConvention proper. If you were wondering where to socialise with fellow forteans, then come and join us for what should be a memorably strange night. Not only will you get the chance to test your esoteric knowledge and win goodies galore in the Great Fortean Pub Quiz, but you'll be serenaded with unearthly theremin sounds by Sarah 'Spacedog' Angliss and horrified by 'Atters' Attree's Paranormal Terrors as he shares with us the spine-tingling secrets of his arcane investigations… plus more surprises!

Places are strictly limited, so for details and to book your tickets visit: www.forteantimes.com/events/uncon2011/

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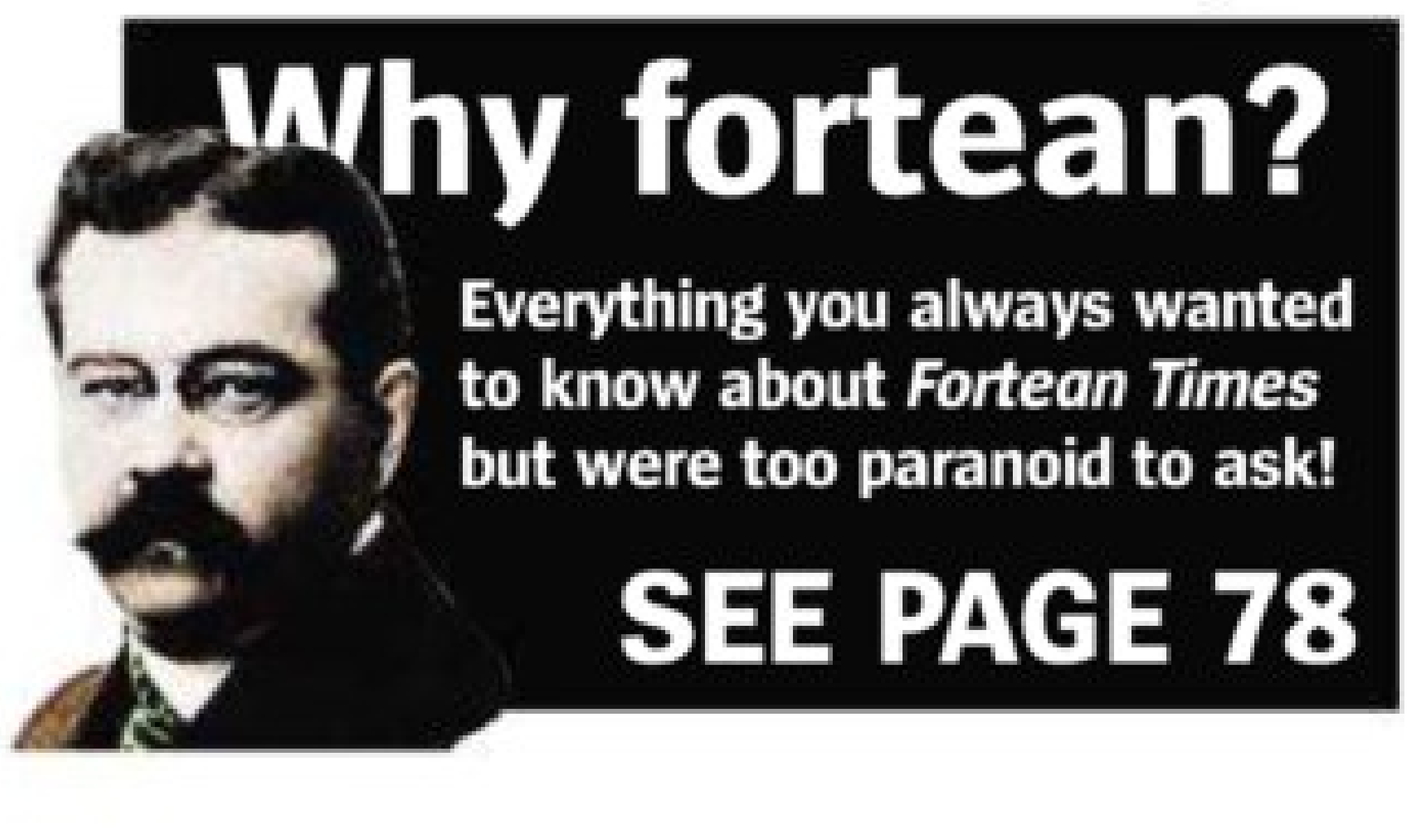
Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING


Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
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LAST CHANCE TO BOOK!

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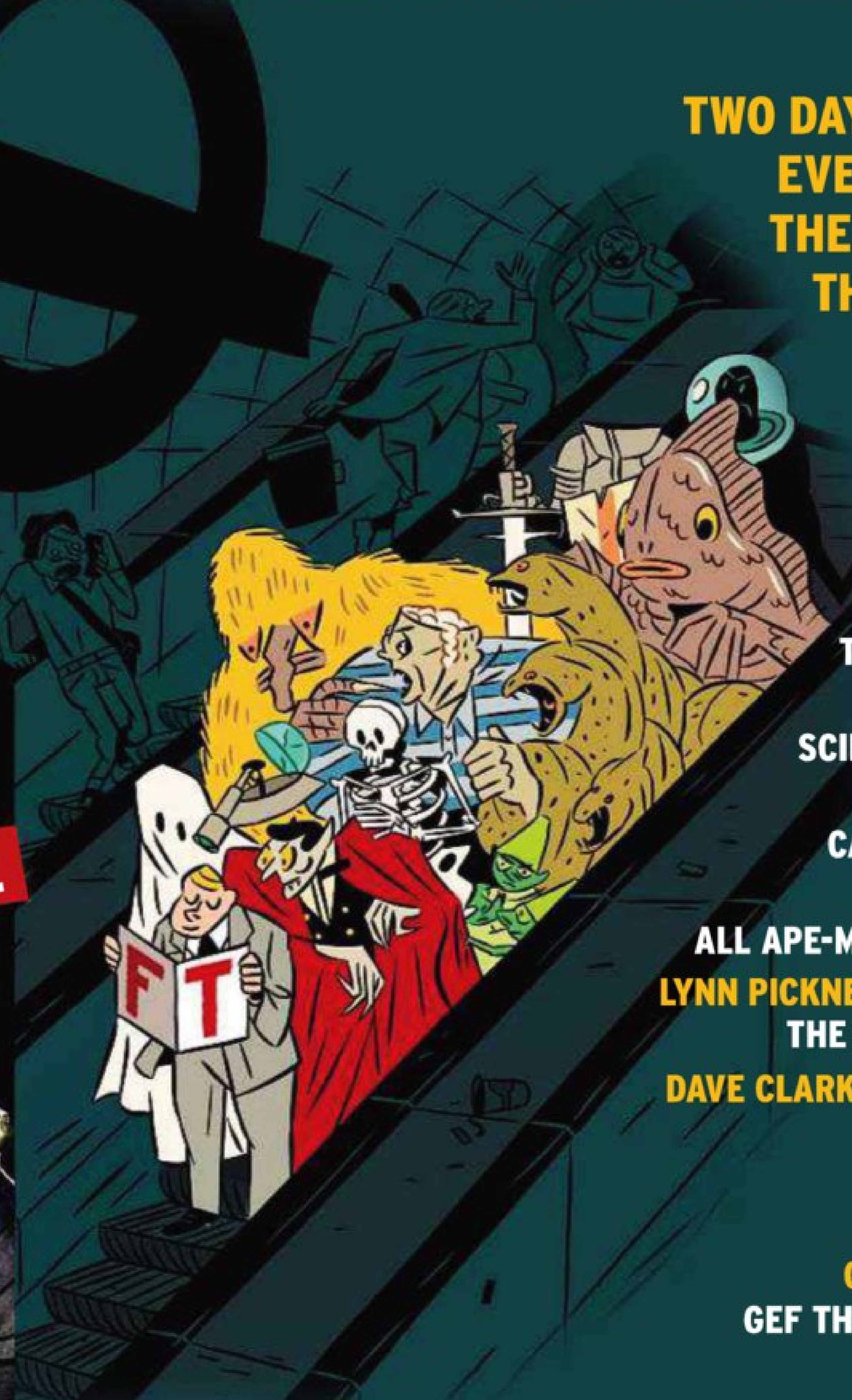

ILLUSTRATION: HUGO PIETTE

TWO DAYS OF TALKS AND EVENTS DEVOTED TO THE INTRIGUING AND THE INEXPLICABLE

DAVE CLARKE
SCARED TO DEATH
SARAH ANGLISS
VOICES OF THE DEAD
JON RONSON
THE PSYCHOPATH TEST
BRIAN REGAL
SCIENCE AND SASQUATCH
JAN BONDESON
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RICHARD FREEMAN
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TED HARRISON
APOCALYPSE WHEN?

PLUS

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ATTERS ATTREE'S PARANORMAL TERRORS

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

Forest teenager emerges

He says he had lived rough with his father after his mother's death, but now had lost his dad too

NATIONALPARK
BAYERISCHER WALD

IMAGEBROKER.NET / SUPERSTOCK

ABOVE LEFT: A composite picture of 'lost boy' Ray. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A German / Czech forest area where Ray might have lived with his father. **FACING PAGE:** Kaspar Hauser.

On 5 September, a 17-year-old boy – blond, blue-eyed and 5ft 11in (1.8m) tall – turned up at Berlin's City Hall, claiming to have been living in a forest with his father for five years. "I'm all alone in the world, I don't know who I am. Please help me," he told security guards. He was wearing winter clothes and carrying a knapsack containing a tent, sleeping bag and some survival tools, including a compass. He spoke a few words of German and fluent English, and appeared in good physical health. "He didn't look like a vagrant," said a civil servant, who asked for her name to be withheld. "He didn't smell, he was clean, and his clothes were clean… Although he claimed to be a native English speaker I detected some sort of accent." At one stage he told her: "I'm looking forward to sleeping in a bed."

The woman contacted child welfare services, who told her to send him to a crisis welfare centre across the city. "I printed off a map for him, wrote some instructions and told him how to buy a ticket for the U-bahn [underground]," she said. Surprisingly, the boy pulled some coins out of his pocket and asked her if they were enough for the journey. He also asked if he could buy his ticket from "a machine", suggesting some familiarity with contemporary travel. He found his way to the emergency youth centre five miles (8km) away. The half-hour journey involved crossing the Rathaus gardens, boarding a train at Alexanderplatz, changing at Charlottenburg for Mierendorffplatz, and then walking for five minutes.

The boy said his name was Ray, and that he and his father, Ryan, moved to the forest about five years ago after his mother, Doreen, died in a car crash. (An initial report stated that he couldn't remember the names of his parents.) He claimed to recall little of his life before the accident, but gave police what he thinks is his date of birth in 1994. He couldn't remember his surname. He is currently in the care of Berlin child welfare authorities.

'Ray' claimed that he had followed his compass north

Father and son were perpetually on the move, he said, sleeping in tents and dugouts and hunting and foraging for food. He told police his father had died after a fall in the woods and he had buried him in a shallow grave piled with stones, before walking north for two weeks to seek help. He was unable to say exactly where he buried his father, only that he "followed his compass northwards" and walked to Berlin as his father had instructed him to do in case of an emergency.

"We have found nothing at all to disprove the story almost two weeks on," said a German police spokesman. "As well as alerting Interpol, we have contacted Czech police to see if there is any indication the woodland south of the city that he refers to could have been in Czech territory. It would have been no problem crossing the border and although he says he had been walking north for two weeks, we believe that was a generalisation. It could have been shorter, which would have put him in the area of the Erzgebirge Nature Park, or if it was longer it could be the Bayerischer National Park, which extends into the Czech Republic." By 21 September, Interpol had failed to match the boy's details with any known missing person and linguistic experts had been unable to pin down his accent. People who have met him say that the composite image (above), published in the German newspaper *Bild*, is a reasonable

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Magnetic powers from the Balkans to Brazil
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Further doubt cast on causes of 14th-century 'Black Death'
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IT'S A DOG'S LIFE
Tales of canine mourning, alarm-raising and heroism
PAGE 26

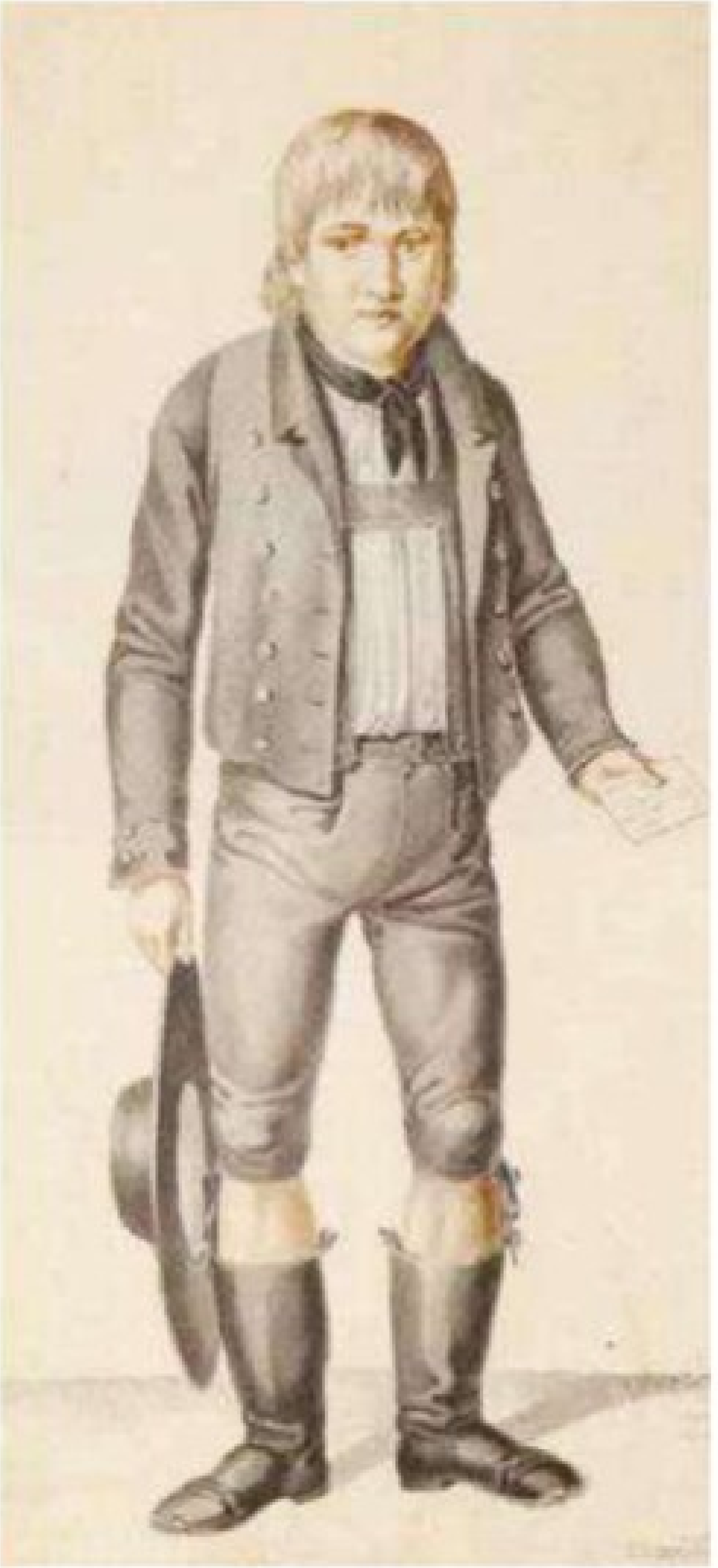
likeness.

At this time of year, father and son could have survived by snaring small game such as rabbits, spearing trout and foraging for various berries, fungi and birds' eggs. "You can make tea or a salad from nettles," said Ronny Schmidt, who runs survival courses. "Dandelion also tastes very good, as do boiled roots. In our forests there are also nuts like sweet chestnut, hazel and beech. Water reed roots provide starch and in spring you can also drink birch and pine sap, which are a good source of vitamin C." However, as zoologist Christian Promberger pointed out: "There is nothing for a human being to eat in a central European forest between November and June."

So did someone provide them with food? Another consideration is the punishing winter temperatures of minus 20°C (minus 4°F). There would have been no shortage of wood to burn, but smouldering fires make smoke, and would have increased the risk of discovery.

Another possible explanation is that 'Ray' is a runaway who has invented a bizarre cover story; or perhaps he has suffered a dissociative fugue, which can be brought on by a sudden crisis, leading the victim to experience near total amnesia and disappear from his or her old life by trying to piece together a new identity. Such episodes normally last a few hours or days, but in rare cases can go on for weeks or months.

• The case, of course, reminded many commentators of the enigma of Kaspar Hauser, who stumbled into Nuremberg in 1828 with almost no knowledge of himself and a tiny vocabulary. Assumed at first to have been raised in the woods, he eventually came up with a story about being kept in a darkened cell – but nobody could ever make head or tail of him [**FT135:52, 169:38–42, 191:46–50**].



A forest-dweller hit the headlines in Germany in 2007 – a 43-year-old American found living in the woods near the Mosel River for the previous four years, after a break-up with his girlfriend. 'Forest Boy' also has echoes of 'Piano Man', found wandering on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent in April 2005, apparently without any knowledge of who he was or how he got there. After four months, he broke his silence and admitted he was a 20-year-old German called Andreas Grassl [**FT199:4–5, 202:19**]. *[AP] BBC News, Guardian, 16 Sept; D.Telegraph, 17+19+20+22 Sept; IB Times, 17 Sept; dailmail.co.uk, 19 Sept; Sunday Telegraph, 25 Sept 2011. For a general survey of feral children, see* **FT161:20–21, 34–41**.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Restoration of headless sheep

Salisbury (Wiltshire) Journal, 14 April 2011.

Pope warns against trying to be God

Irish Examiner, 18 April 2011.

The nun taking on the vampire squid

Guardian, 13 April 2011.

McDonald fries imps

Eastern Daily Press, 6 April 2011.

Mole kills two soldiers

Morning Star, 5 April 2011.

Half children see parents split before 16

D.Telegraph, 18 April 2011.

Llamas rescue endangered fish by carrying them up mountain

Metro, 12 April 2011.

Jellyfish invade Japan

D.Telegraph, 11 Mar 2011.

Pinner man's bins not collected due to sock

Harrow Observer, 14 April 2011.

Celebs to blame for ageing kids

Morning Star, 12 April 2011.

Donkeys in Norwich have their space hoppers stolen

Eastern Daily Press, 6 April 2011.

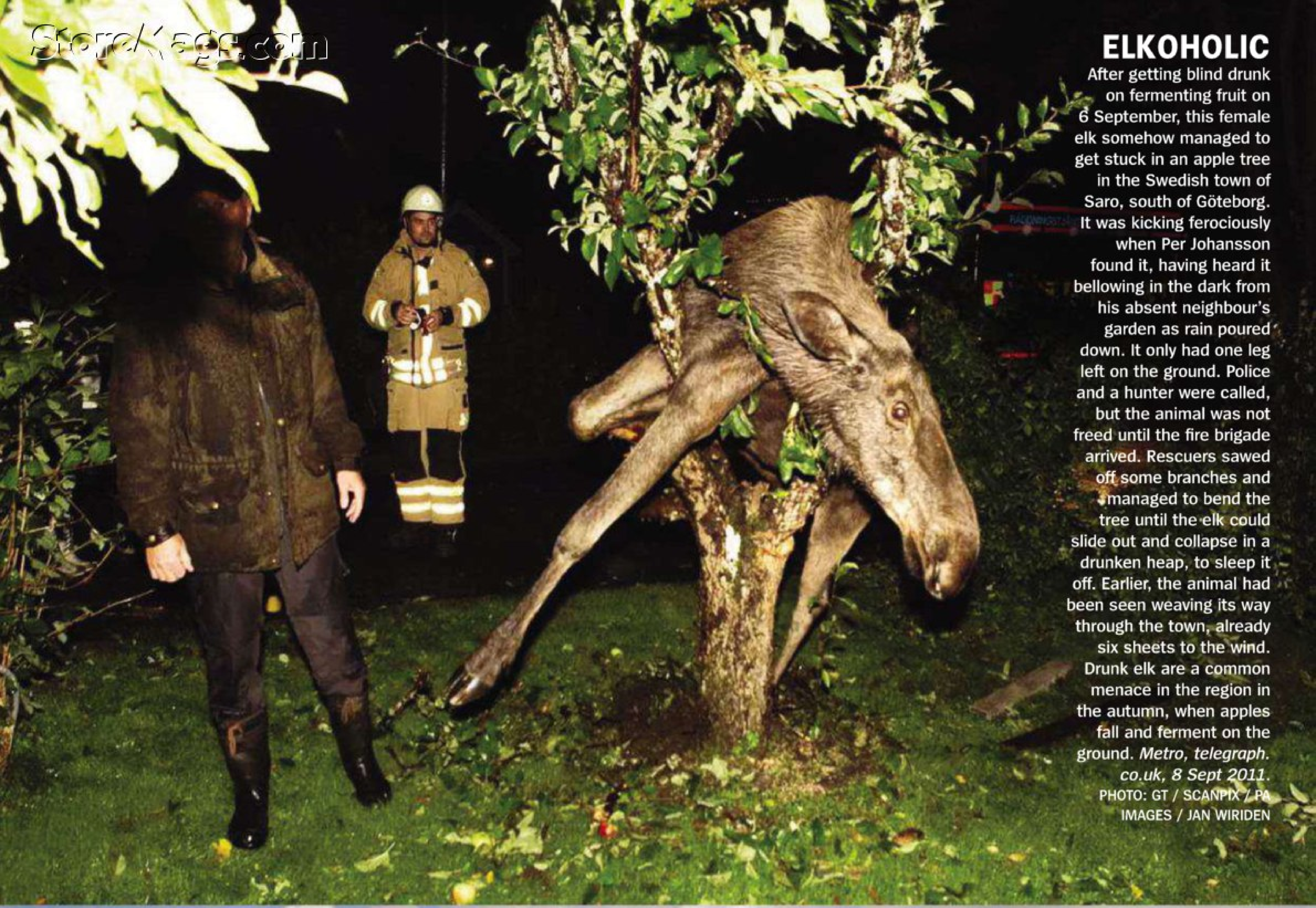
Chinese ban on time travel

(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 16 April 2011.

SNAP HIJACKED

Nadine Dougherty, 27, and her friend Laura Molina, 30, were posing on Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa, when a rock hyrax, which looks a little like a guinea pig, darted in front of the photographer, Guido Del Solar, 29. He said: "I thought it would keep running past but it stopped and looked straight at the camera." *Sun, 30 April 2011*.

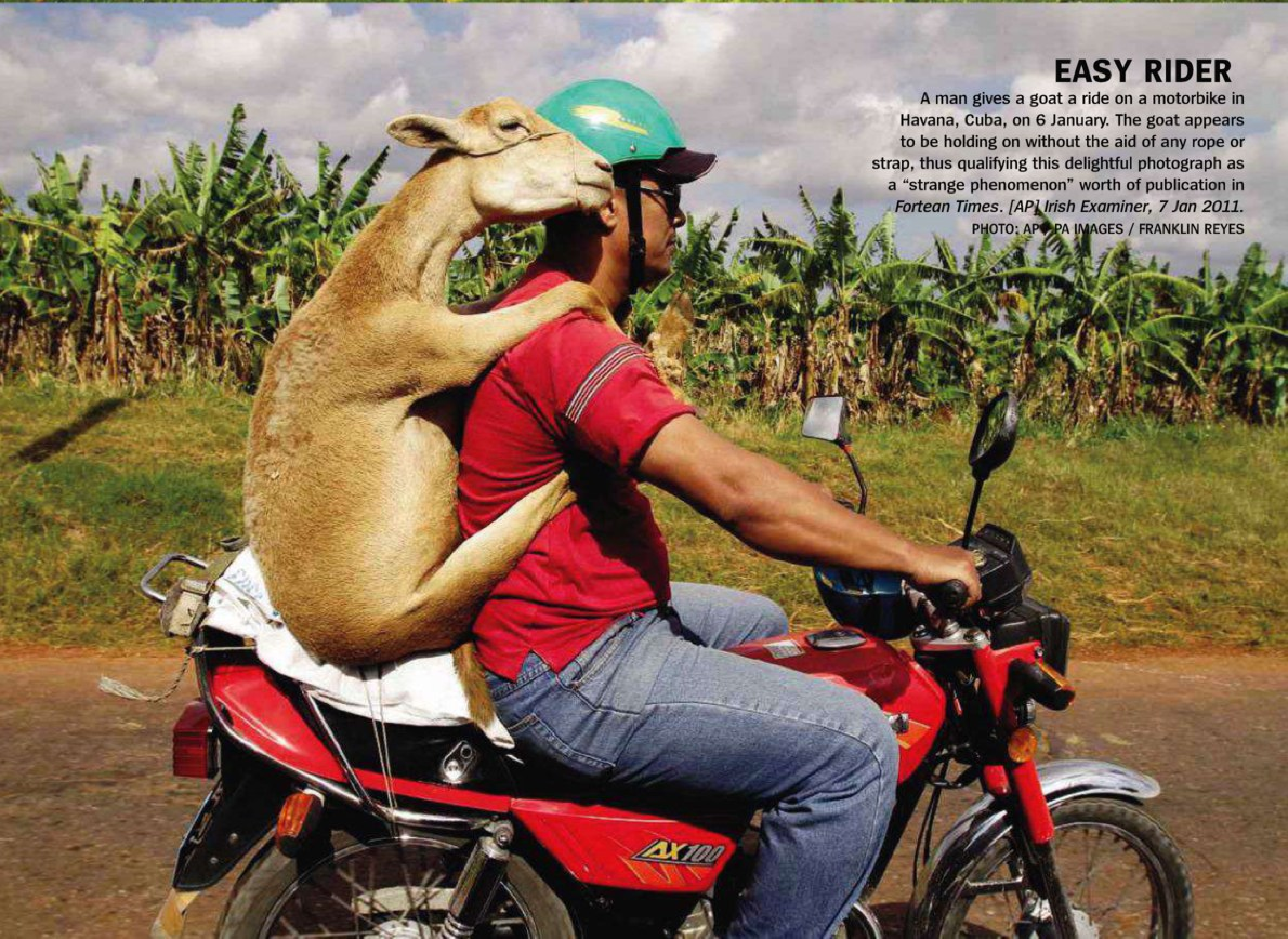
PHOTO: BNPS



ELKOHOLIC

After getting blind drunk on fermenting fruit on 6 September, this female elk somehow managed to get stuck in an apple tree in the Swedish town of Saro, south of Göteborg. It was kicking ferociously when Per Johansson found it, having heard it bellowing in the dark from his absent neighbour's garden as rain poured down. It only had one leg left on the ground. Police and a hunter were called, but the animal was not freed until the fire brigade arrived. Rescuers sawed off some branches and managed to bend the tree until the elk could slide out and collapse in a drunken heap, to sleep it off. Earlier, the animal had been seen weaving its way through the town, already six sheets to the wind. Drunk elk are a common menace in the region in the autumn, when apples fall and ferment on the ground. *Metro, telegraph.co.uk, 8 Sept 2011.*

PHOTO: GT / SCANPIX / PA IMAGES / JAN WIRIDEN



EASY RIDER

A man gives a goat a ride on a motorbike in Havana, Cuba, on 6 January. The goat appears to be holding on without the aid of any rope or strap, thus qualifying this delightful photograph as a "strange phenomenon" worth of publication in *Fortean Times*. *[AP] Irish Examiner, 7 Jan 2011.*

PHOTO: AP / PA IMAGES / FRANKLIN REYES

SIDELINES...

FRENCH GOLD FEVER

Didier Héricart de Thury and Franck Daffos, who published *The Gold of Rennes* on 12 July, believe that a cave in a tiny hill called Pech d'En-Couty, near the village of Sougraigne in the Aude region of southwest France, contains King Solomon's gold and possibly the Holy Grail. The site, near Rennes-le-Château, was revealed online by a rival "researcher", Michel Vallet. "We get nutters all the time," said the mayor of Rennes, Alexandre Painco. *D.Telegraph, 30 July 2011.*

ZAPPED YET AGAIN

Melvin Roberts, 59, of Seneca, South Carolina, was in hospital on 30 June recovering after being struck by lightning for the sixth time, while covering a mower. He was last struck in 2007 while protecting a hencoop. He had been married five times – which presumably has no bearing on his conductivity. *Sun, 1 July 2011.*

JASMINE OUTLAWED

Since the Tunisians dubbed their revolt the Jasmine Revolution, reference to the flowering cousin of the olive has been censored in social media by the Chinese authorities, despite being the subject of a Qing Dynasty folk song often heard while on hold with provincial bureaucrats. Chinese characters for "jasmine" have been blocked in cell phone text messages and a Jasmine Cultural Festival cancelled. *Int. Herald Tribune, 11 May 2011.*

KIM CONFUSION

Kim Pyong-il, half brother of Dear Leader Kim Jong-il, was put under house arrest in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, because his resemblance to their father, the late Great Leader Kim il-sung, could derail the transfer of power to Kim Jong-il's son. Kim Pyong-il, who was the ambassador to Poland, had returned to Pyongyang in May to see his ailing mother, Kim Song-Ae. *D.Telegraph, 2 July 2011.*

Magnetic personality

Mirror, mirror... who is the most attractive of them all?

LEFT: Croatian six-year-old Ivan Stoiljkovic attracting attention .

REX FEATURES / SIPA PRESS

A seven-year-old Serbian boy called Bogdan attracted press attention last February when his family claimed he was 'magnetic', a characteristic he allegedly has had since birth. He was photographed with a variety of objects stuck to his chest – not just metal things such as cutlery and a TV remote, but china plates and bowls. This obviously rules out 'ordinary' magnetism. The fact that Bogdan's skin could support a heavy frying pan was said to show that he is not just a sticky little boy.

• Three months later, the press carried pictures of six-year-old Ivan Stoiljkovic (right), with a variety of objects stuck to his chest and arms. Ivan, from the small village of Heresin near Koprivnica in northern Croatia, was said to be capable of supporting up to 55lb (25kg) of metal – frying pans, irons, dumbbells, mobile phones, trays, and cutlery. Sceptics suspected his ample waistline helps support the objects, but his wild talents were said to run deeper.

When a neighbour hurt his foot in a tractor accident, he claimed the pain miraculously disappeared when Ivan was around, and reappeared when he was not. Dragica, Ivan's grandmother, said: "When something hurts us, we ask Ivan to put his hands on the sore and the pain disappears in a flash." His grandfather Ivo, who suffers from stomach pains, said that when Ivan lays his hands on him they become extremely hot and the pain disappears. Ivan is very strong for his age, and can lug 110lb (50kg) sacks of cement around the village.

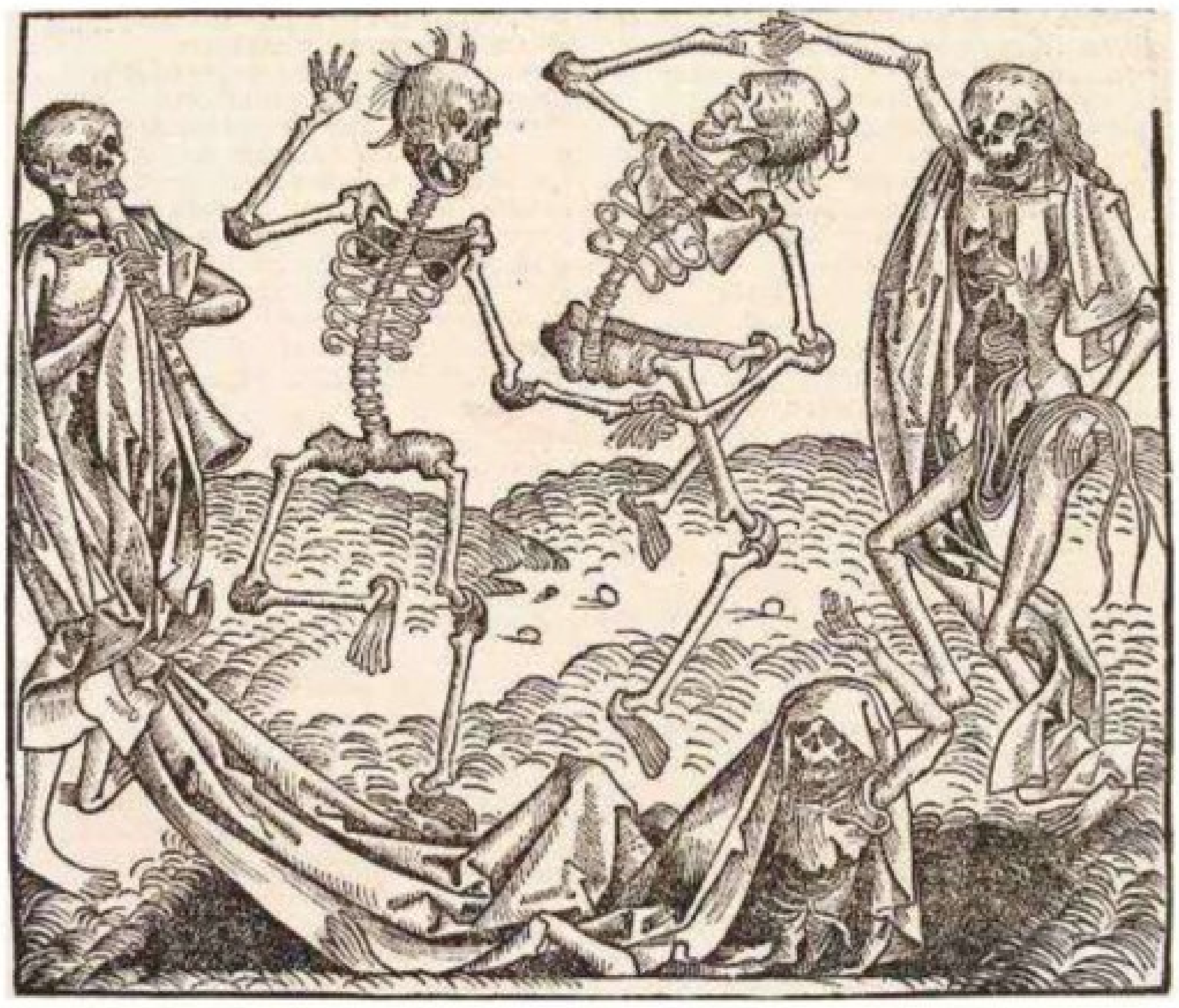
Ivan's powers include 'sticky' skin and the art of healing

• In the wake of news stories about Ivan, Brazil's Globo TV network broadcast pictures of 11-year-old Paulo David Amorim with frying pans, cameras, cutlery and other metal objects stuck on his chest, stomach and back. And in Serbia, Sibin Ivanovic became a magnet for all things metal after he was zapped with high voltage to restart his heart. "I'm hoping to have the same attractive effect on women, but probably only if they wear lots of jewellery," said the 66-year-old, from the northern town of Jagodina.

• There are many photographs on the Internet of apparently 'magnetic' people with objects stuck to their skin; tellingly, they are seldom if ever shown leaning forwards. According to Benjamin Radford, managing editor of *Skeptical Inquirer*, "These people aren't magnetic, it's just that things that have smooth surfaces stick to skin. Often [they] have smooth skin and hairless chests." Gabor Somorjai, a professor of chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley, explained that the grease on skin has a very low surface energy, due to the fact that it is a liquid. "Its atoms are only connected with weak bonds," he said. By contrast, metals, with their strong atomic bonds, have very high surface energies. "Things that have high surface energies want to go into a lower energy state," he said, "and so they want to be covered with a low surface-energy material." The smoother the object and the larger its surface area, the more it will stick. Of course, this explanation fails to account for the associated phenomenon of anomalous human electrical fields or Ivan Stoiljkovic's alleged healing abilities. *dailymail.co.uk, 24 Feb; LiveScience.com, 28 Feb; [R] Metro, 12 May, 26 July; (Queensland) Courier-Mail, 14 July 2011. For other 'electric' and 'magnetic' people, see* **FT25:46, 47:11, 49:8, 59:11, 83:9, 88:8, 114:52, 144:8, 150:14, 155:12, 269:8.**

Are rats exonerated?

Debate on the medical facts behind the Great Pestilence



ABOVE: The Dance of Death became a favourite subject of 14th-century art.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

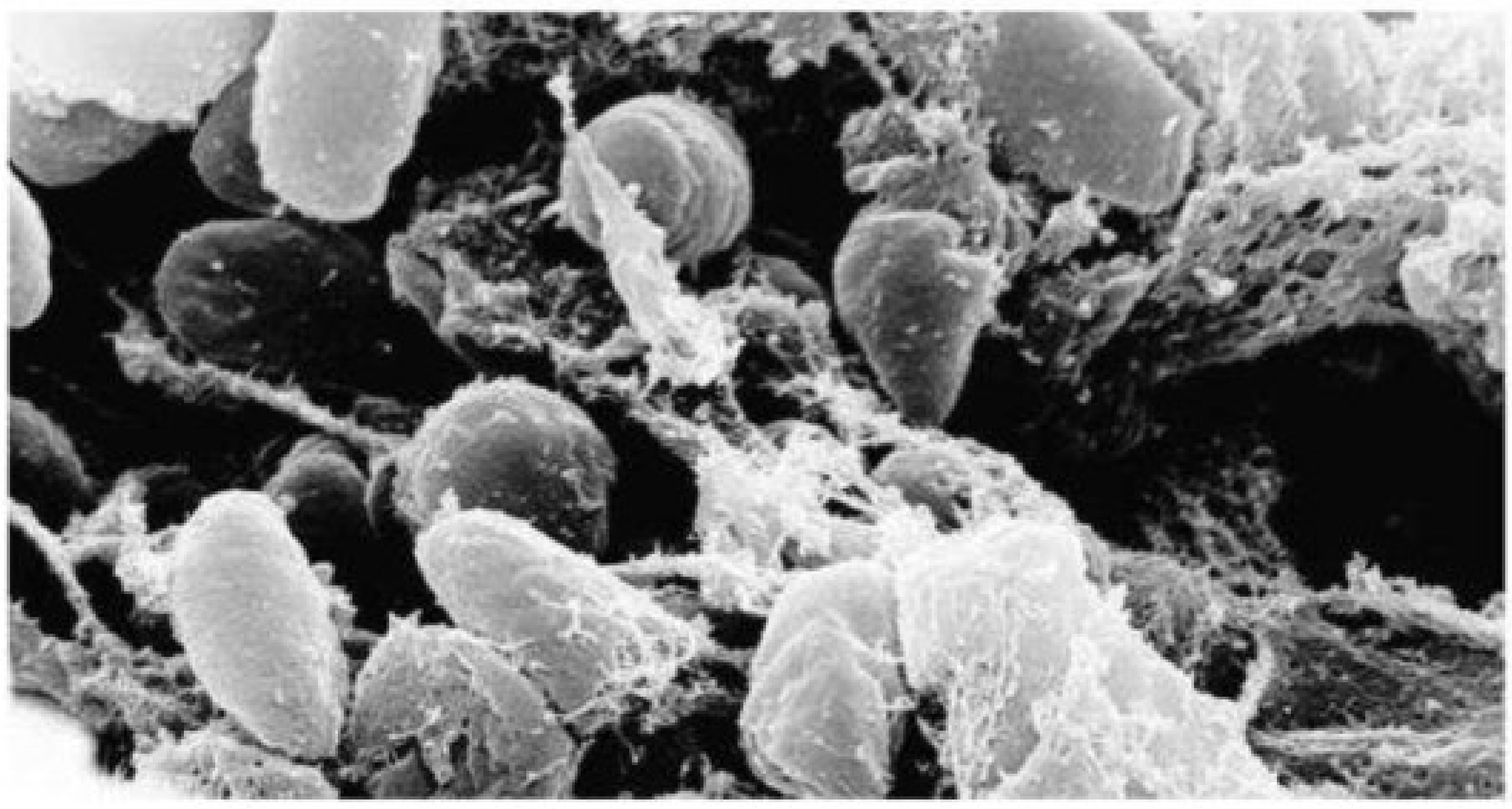
The traditional view is that the Black Death that devastated Europe in the 14th century was bubonic plague carried by fleas that lived on black rats. The rodents supposedly carried the disease from China, and it arrived in Sicily in 1347, in boats returning from the Crimea. However, according to Barney Sloane, author of *The Black Death in London*, the disease spread so quickly that rats could not be the carriers. (It should also be pointed out that the flea, *Xenopsylla cheopsis*, has been shown to live for up to a month without either a human or rat host. This could have enabled it to survive in the ships' cargo before passing the plague directly to humans, by biting the sailors who unloaded the merchandise.)

Dr Sloane, formerly a field archæologist at the Museum of London who worked on many mediæval sites, spent nearly 10 years researching his book, poring over excavation reports and contemporary records, such as wills and the proceedings of the Court of Hustings. "We ought to be finding great heaps of dead rats in all the waterfront sites, but they just aren't there," he said. "And all the evidence I've looked at suggests the plague spread too fast for the traditional explanation of transmission by rats and fleas. It has to be person to person – there just isn't time for the rats to be spreading it."

He concluded that the spread of the 1348–49 plague, the worst ever to hit the capital, was far faster with an impact far worse than had been estimated previously. While some suggest half the city's population of 60,000 died, he believes it could have been as high as two-thirds. Years later, in 1357, merchants were trying to get a tax cut because a third of all property in the city was empty. "It was originally thought the plague arrived in England in the spring of 1348 and had spread to London by late summer," he said. "My research suggests it arrived in England in autumn and had reached the capital by November. Its spread accelerated over the winter. If it had been bubonic plague – which is spread by rats – we would expect the spread to slow down over winter because rats are susceptible to the cold."

He added: "It was certainly the Black Death, but it is by no means certain what that disease was, whether in fact it was bubonic plague." However, genetic analysis of 109 skeletons taken from the East Smithfield mass burial site of the 1340s in the East End of London, published this August in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, identified the presence of the plague bacterium *Yersinia pestis* (sample bellow), so the terrible scourge that carried off an estimated 75 million lives worldwide in 1347–53, including at least a third of the European population, remains enigmatic.

(The term "Black Death" was not used at the time – it was known as the "Great Pestilence", "Great Death" or "Sudden Death", or blamed on neighbouring countries. "Black Death" seems to have been a mistranslation by Scandinavian scholars of "Terrible Death" from a Latin text and entered English as late as the 18th or 19th century. See Mythconceptions 87, **FT200:17**.) *Guardian, 18 Aug; D.Mail, 19 Aug; Times, 30 Aug 2011; "Rats, Lice and History" (1935) by Hans Zinsser; "The Black Death" (1969) by Philip Zeigler; "Plagues and Peoples" (1976), by William H McNeill; "Rats, the New Plague" (1990), by Charles Golding.*



SIDELINES...

FUSSY BIRD

A seagull dubbed Salty shoplifted more than 100 packets of Walkers salt'n'vinegar crisps from C&S News in Margate, Kent, in one year. Newsagent Paul Heath tried moving the crisps, but the bird still found them. It showed no interest in other flavours. *Sun, 25 June 2011*.

HEYERDAHL VINDICATED

In 1947, Thor Heyerdahl and a small crew sailed 4,300 miles (6,900km) on his balsa raft *Kon-Tiki* to show that Polynesia could have been colonised from South America rather than from Asia – but the scientific establishment was not convinced. However, research by Prof. Eric Thorsby of the University of Oslo has shown that the genetic make-up of descendants of the original islanders includes DNA that could only have come from native Americans. *D.Telegraph, 18 June 2011*.

ATOMIC KITCHEN

In an attempt to split the atom in his kitchen, Richard Handl, 31, acquired radium, americium and uranium online and tried to create a nuclear reaction at his apartment in Ängelholm, western Sweden. He only managed a small meltdown on his stove. Having doubts about whether the experiment was legal, he called the Swedish radiation authority to check – and was subsequently arrested for unauthorised possession of nuclear material. *The Local (Sweden), 2 Aug; [AP] 5 Aug 2011*.

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

DON'T MESS WITH OLGA

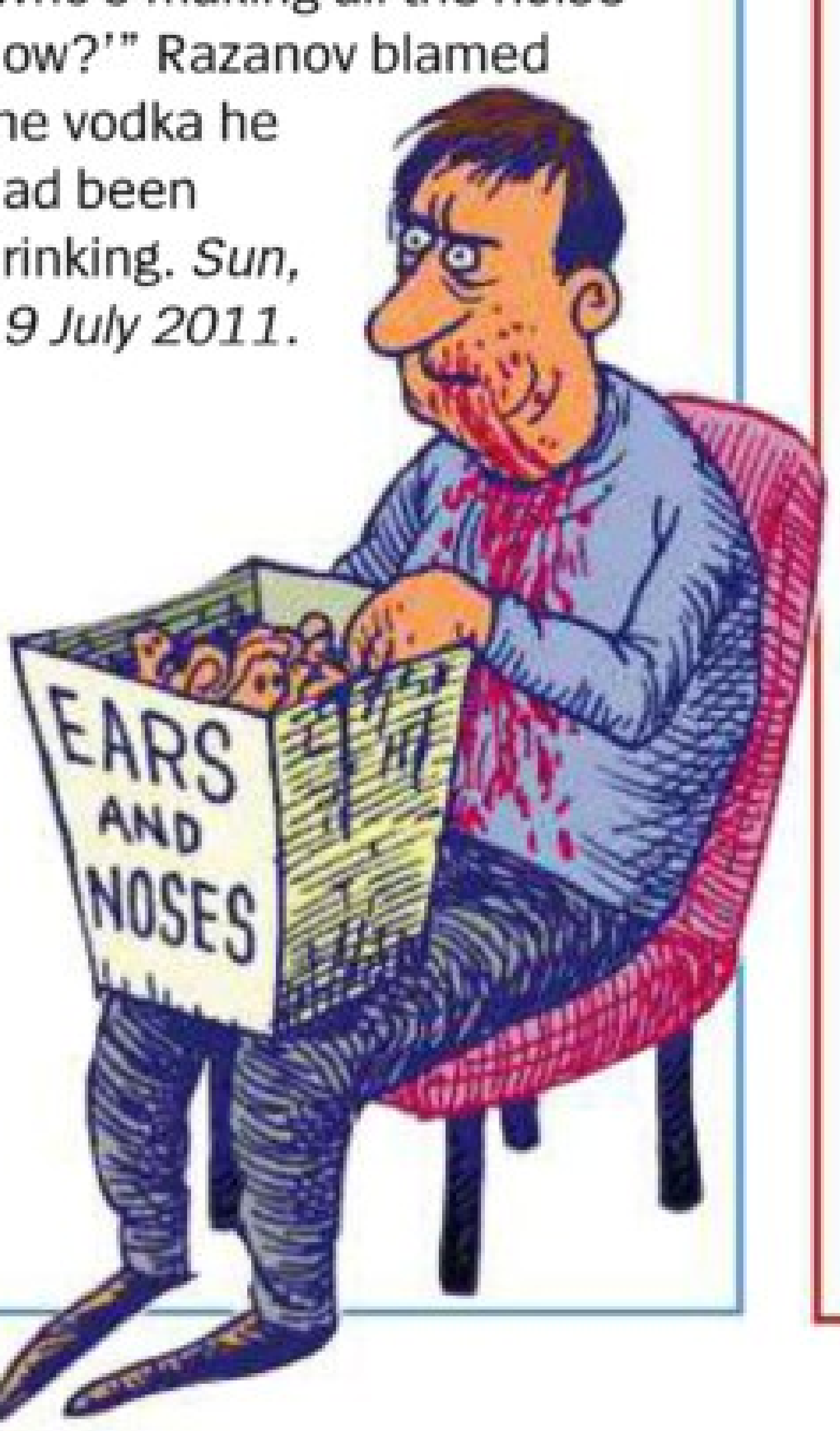
Viktor Jasinski, 32, tried to rob a hair salon in Meshchovsk, Russia, but Olga Zajac, 28, the salon owner and a karate black belt, overpowered him, tied him up naked with a hair dryer cable, and used him as a sex slave for three days while force-feeding him Viagra. When he was released, he complained to the police, who arrested them both. "Yes, we had sex a couple of times," said Olga, "but I bought him new jeans and even gave him 1,000 roubles." *MX News (Sydney), 13 July 2011.*

AWESOME FOURSOME

Tracey Bageban, 34, from Gateshead, gave birth to twin girls, Dolcie and Elisia, on 27 February 2011. On 27 February 2008, she had given birth to twin boys, Diego and Armani. Tracey and her husband Davood conceived both sets of twins naturally. *Guinness World Records* said they were the only family in Britain to have two sets of identical twins born on the same day. *D.Mail, 18 April 2011.*

CANNIBAL FILM-GOER

Dmitry Markin, 27, had his nose and ear bitten off by a lawyer sitting next to him in a cinema in Noginsk, Russia. He had asked Sergey Razanov, 27, to eat his popcorn more quietly during the horror film. The lawyer then ate his ear. Markin said: "I was screaming and he said, 'Who's making all the noise now?'" Razanov blamed the vodka he had been drinking. *Sun, 19 July 2011.*

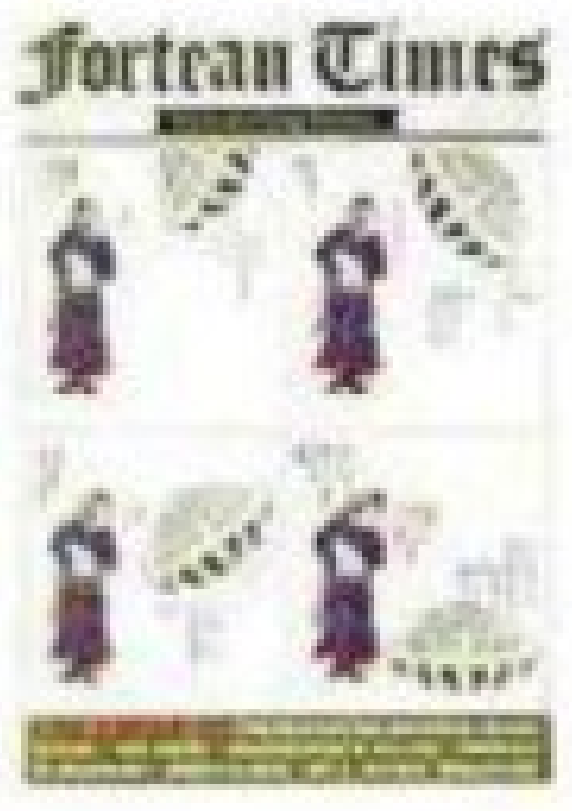


MARTIN ROSS

Fortean follow-ups

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN STORIES PREVIOUSLY REPORTED IN *FORTEAN TIMES*

MAIDEN CASTLE ALLIGATOR [FT48:9]



When a stuffed alligator was unearthed in 1986 at Maiden Castle, the Iron Age hillfort in Dorset, a spokesman for English Heritage speculated that it had been buried there by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in the 1930s, but the Gang of Fort doubted that such a jape was in character for the conceited archæological celebrity. What passed us by at the time was that the archæologist Rachel Maxwell-Hyslop (an authority on Near Eastern metalwork who died on 9 May 2011) wrote to *The Times* explaining the croc's presence. In 1933, she was on her first dig at Maiden Castle, under the direction of Wheeler, then director of the London Museum. Petrol was expensive, so 19-year-old Rachel Clay (as she then was) camped at the summit of the site in her father's World War I tent. A rumour circulated that one of the Neolithic pits was inhabited by a crocodile. Investigating, she indeed found "a perfectly good stuffed crocodile" which, it transpired, had been dumped by the museum in nearby Dorchester. Eventually, she and her colleagues put a penny in the beast's mouth and buried it in one of the excavation trenches. She didn't get on with Wheeler who, she said, "spent an awful lot of time playing around with the good-looking female students". *D.Telegraph, 4 Aug 2011.*

MARCO POLO AND CHINA [FT86:59]

forteantimes
DINOSAURS ALIVE!

Marco Polo's *Description of the World*, one of the first travel books, is allegedly based on his journeys as a trader between 1271 and 1295, including 17 years in China, and was supposedly written in conjunction with the romance writer Rustichello when they were imprisoned together. However, there are many variant manuscripts, some containing considerable interpolations, and it's not clear when or why the pair were in jail. Frances Wood, head of the Chinese section at the British Library, cast doubt on the travel narrative in her 1995 book, *Did Marco Polo Go To China?* suggesting the Venetian merchant never got further than the Black Sea. She points out, for instance, that Polo (above) fails to mention the Great Wall, tea, chopsticks, or foot-binding; and there is no mention of Polo in Chinese records, despite the fact that Chinese histories mention far less important foreigners. "There's nothing in the Venetian archives to say that the Polo family had direct contact with China at all," Dr Wood said recently. "Nothing from China has ever been found in the possessions they left behind. One theory is that Marco Polo copied a sort of guidebook on China written by a Persian merchant. Only about 18 sentences in the entire manuscript are written in the first person – it is extremely rare for him to say 'I saw this with my own eyes'. I believe that rather than being one person's account, it's a sort of mediæval database of European knowledge of the Far East at the time."

Now Italian archæologists working in Japan have cast further doubt on Polo's veracity. They point in particular to inconsistencies in his description of Kublai Khan's attempted invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281. "He confuses the two, mixing up details about the first expedition with those of the second," Prof. Daniele Petrella of the University of Naples, the leader of the archæological project, told Italian history magazine *Focus Storia*. "In his account of the first invasion, he describes the fleet leaving Korea and being hit by a typhoon before it reached the Japanese coast. But that happened in 1281 – is it really possible that a supposed eye-witness could confuse events which were seven years apart?"

Polo's description of the Mongol fleet is sharply at odds with the remains of ships the team has excavated in Japan. He wrote of five-masted ships, when they had only three. "When he describes Kublai Khan's fleet he talks about the pitch that was used to make ships' hulls watertight," said Prof. Petrella. "He used the word 'chunam', which in Chinese and Mongol means nothing. In fact, it is the *Persian* word for pitch. It's also odd that instead of using, as he does in most instances, local names to describe places, he used Persian terms for Mongol and Chinese place names." *D.Telegraph, 10 Aug 2011.*

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE (ENGRAVING BY GAETANO BONUTTI, VENETIAN SCHOOL)

FROMAGE FRAY [FT117:21]

forteantimes
SMOKIN'!

Rebel cheese rollers defied the weather on 30 May 2011 for a chance to chase 8lb (3.6kg) Double Gloucester cheeses down Cooper's Hill in Brockworth, Gloucestershire (facing page). They staged their own unofficial event after the world famous rite was cancelled for the second year running by health and safety spoilsports. The race had been advertised on social networking sites and went ahead despite a large police presence. Several hundred spectators braved the mist and rain to watch about a dozen daredevils slip, somersault and tumble 200 yards (183m) down the one-in-two gradient. The first person to grab the cheese wins – and gets to keep the cheese. Champion local roller Chris Anderson, 23, won the three adult male races while Joanna Guest, 14, from Wolverhampton, came out on top in the women's race. There were no injuries, for a change. (Earlier in the month, students at the Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology staged their own cheese-rolling event.)

Gloucestershire cheese-rolling records date back to the 1850s and – as with many folk customs round the country – there are

PA WIRE / PA IMAGES

unsupported claims that its roots lie in a heathen spring festival. Because of wartime rationing, between 1941 and 1954 a wooden "cheese" was used with a small piece of real cheese in the middle. The last time the race was held, in 2009, more than 15,000 people turned up. A plan this year to move the race to June and make it a two-day festival were scrapped when it was announced that, to cover rising insurance costs, people would be charged £20 to attend. *News of the World, 8 May; Independent, D.Telegraph, 31 May 2011.*

WOODS DEADLY FOR DOGS [FT271:9]

ForteanTimes
HR GIGER'S REAL ALIEN

In the first half of September, 11 dogs fell ill within hours of being walked in woods on the Queen's estate at Sandringham in Norfolk, which are open to the public. In the autumn of 2010, 37 dogs contracted the so-called Seasonal Canine Illness after visiting Sandringham – and six died. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhœa and lethargy. The illness was first identified at the estate and other woodland areas in 2009. Cases always occur between September and November. The Queen has asked the Animal Health Trust (AHT) veterinary charity to investigate. Suspects include bacteria, blue-green algæ and fungal spores. The illness is not believed to have affected the Queen's beloved corgis or her other dogs. *telegraph.co.uk, 18 Sept 2011.*

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS [FT273:11]

ForteanTimes

These mystifying and unsettling impostors have struck again, this time in Wiltshire. Police warned parents to be wary after two women claiming to be from the county's social services department tried to gain access to a house in Andover Road, Ludgershall, around 10am on 9 May. Wiltshire Council had no knowledge of the two fake social workers. *Western Daily News, 11 May 2011.*

STRANGER ON THE SHORE [FT278:7]

ForteanTimes

"Happy Feet", the young emperor penguin found on a beach in New Zealand's North Island on 20 June, 2,000 miles (3,200km) from home, was nursed back to health in Wellington Zoo and released back into the Southern Ocean, about 50 miles (80km) north of Campbell Island, from the research vessel *Tangaroa* on 4 September. He was fitted with a tracking device, but on 9 September this stopped relaying information. Either Happy Feet had been eaten or – more likely – the device had just fallen off. "To be uninvasive, we only glued it on so that it would fall off," said a member of the tracking team. "We hoped it would stay on for five or six months [until the new year moult], but it appears in this case it's only stayed on for two weeks." (This suggests it was stuck on some time before the bird was released.) The truth about his fate will probably never be known. *D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 5 Sept; BBC News, Guardian, 12 Sept 2011.*

LATEST FLOATING FOOT [FT278:19]

A human foot in a woman's running shoe washed up in the Pacific Northwest on 30 August, the eleventh severed foot since 2007 – eight off the coast in British Columbia and three in Washington State. It was seen floating along the shore of Vancouver's False Creek. Then, on 5 and 6 September, four running shoes containing what looked like human remains turned up on the beaches of Oak Bay on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, but these turned out to be stuffed with pork or beef in what police believe was a student prank, part of an annual ritual called Endurance Night. *[AP] 31 Aug; National Post (Toronto), 1+2 Sept; Times Colonist (Victoria, BC) 6 Sept 2011.*

SIDELINES...

AND NOW WITH WINGS

Lee Bridges was outside with her dogs in Helena, Montana, when there was a power outage. She asked the driver of a NorthWestern Energy truck what had caused the problem. He pointed up and said: "Apparently, we've got a deer with wings". Ms Bridges saw a dead fawn on a power line. She suspected an eagle had dropped its prey and could not retrieve it. *[AP] 16 June 2011.*

FRIED GONADS

Ivo Salvich, 28, was treated for serious burns to his privates after stealing a hot rotisserie chicken and stuffing it down his trousers. He begged staff to peel the bird from his groin where it was stuck fast by hot fat. He was due to be charged with theft when he left hospital in Zupanja, Croatia. *Sun, 24 Aug 2011.*

BLAST THAT WART

For five years, Sean Murphy, 38, suffered from a painful wart on the top joint of a middle finger. Standard ointments had failed to get rid of it, so the security guard aimed a 12-bore Beretta shotgun at the offending growth and accidentally blew off half the finger. He had found the gun in a hedge and was convicted at Doncaster of firearm possession without a certificate. Ordered to pay costs and do community work, he said: "The best thing is that the wart has gone." *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 16 June 2011.*

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

LIVING THE DREAM

New Zealander Kelly Ann Hunter, 20, told an ex-flatmate she was having his baby, duped officials into issuing birth and death certificates, and bought a cemetery plot with a plaque for "Jesse", her imaginary child. She then accused the supposed father's new girlfriend of digging up the ashes. She was sentenced to nine months' "supervision". *MX News, 16 June 2011.*

FISH SCUPPER

Tourist Tina Fletcher, 25, was on an airboat trip at Fanning Springs State Park in Florida when a giant sturgeon leapt out of the Suwannee River and struck her, breaking her leg. She was the fifth person hurt on the river this year by sturgeon – which can grow to 8ft (2.4m) and 200lb (90kg). Previous victims had suffered fractured spines and slit throats from the fishes' armour-like scales. *D.Mirror, 1 June 2011.*

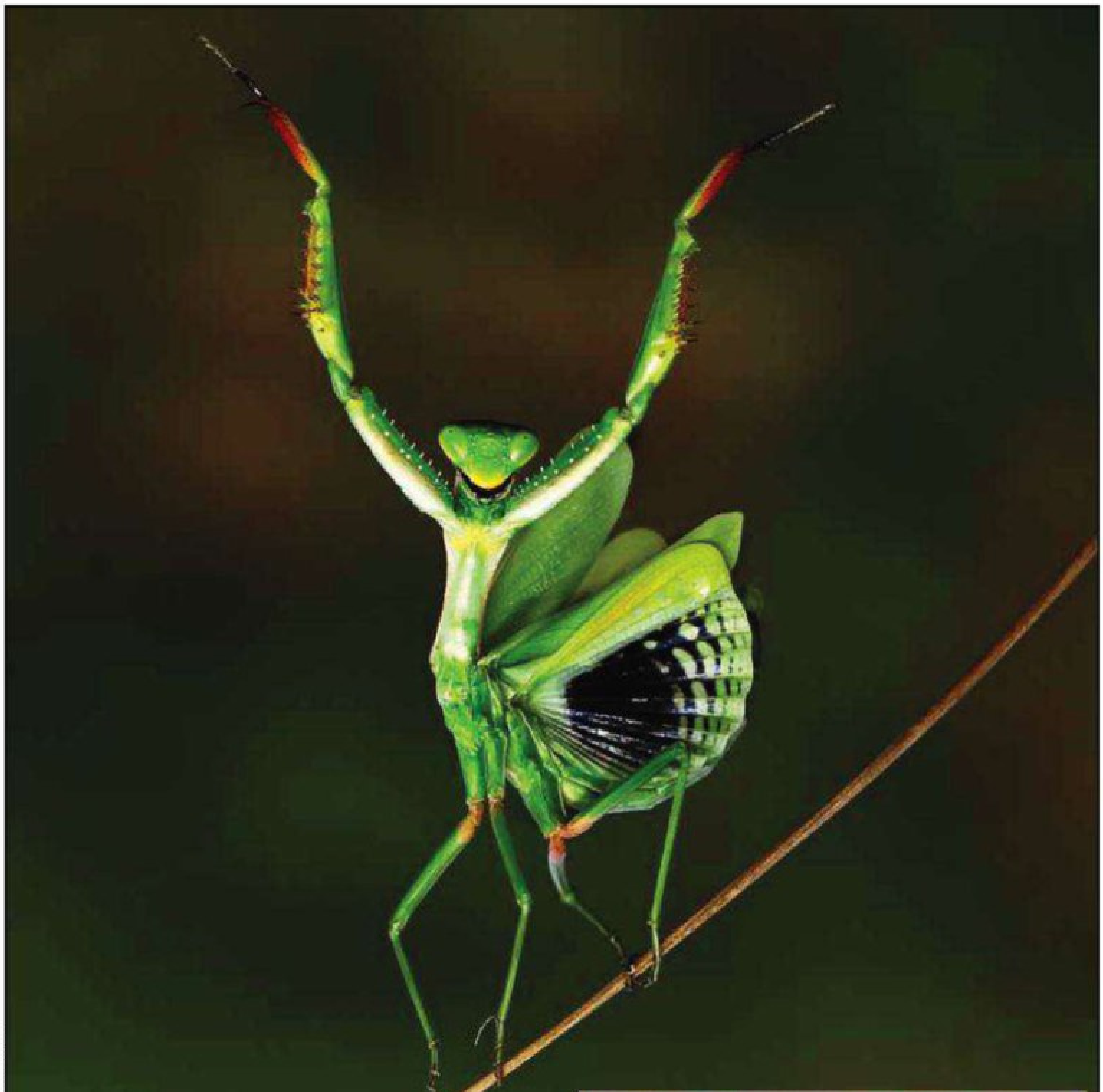
ZEN PUNISHMENT

A court in Belarus fined a one-armed man a million roubles (£125) for "clapping loudly" during a speech by President Alexander Lukashenko on 7 July. Witnesses said Konstantin Kaplin, an unemployed man from Grodno, took part in the flash mob "clapping protest" in Minsk, but it was not explained how he managed with only one hand. In another case, a deaf mute was accused of shouting anti-government slogans. *Christian Science Monitor, 8 July; Metro, 12 July 2011.*

MAMMAL CONFUSION

When a 33-year-old man burst into an apartment in Hoquiam, Washington State, looking for his girlfriend, a guest in the apartment asked him: "Why are you carrying a weasel?" The man replied: "It's not a weasel, it's a marten," then punched him on the nose and fled, leaving the dead animal behind. Later, a police spokesman said it was not a marten, but a mink. *[AP] 8 June; KXRO News (WA), 9 June 2011.*

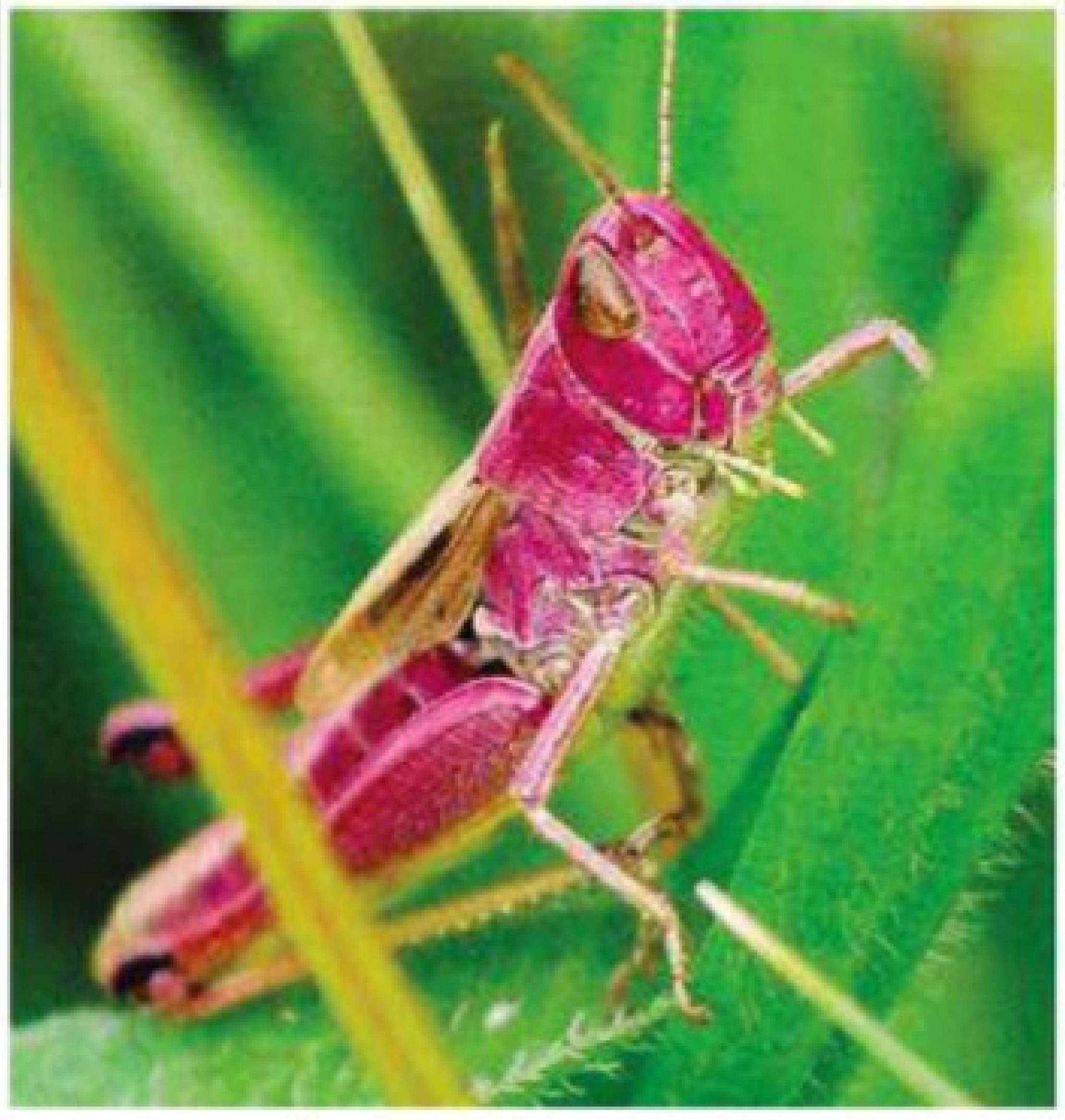
I'M READY FOR MY CLOSE-UP NOW



CATERS / HASAN BAGLAR

DO YOU WANNA DANCE?

This praying mantis *Iris oratoria* was startled by photographer Hasan Baglar in Cyprus and adopted this typical threat posture to warn him off. It was even able to maintain the pose as he transferred it from a small branch to the grass beside him. *D.Mail, 21 Sept 2011.*



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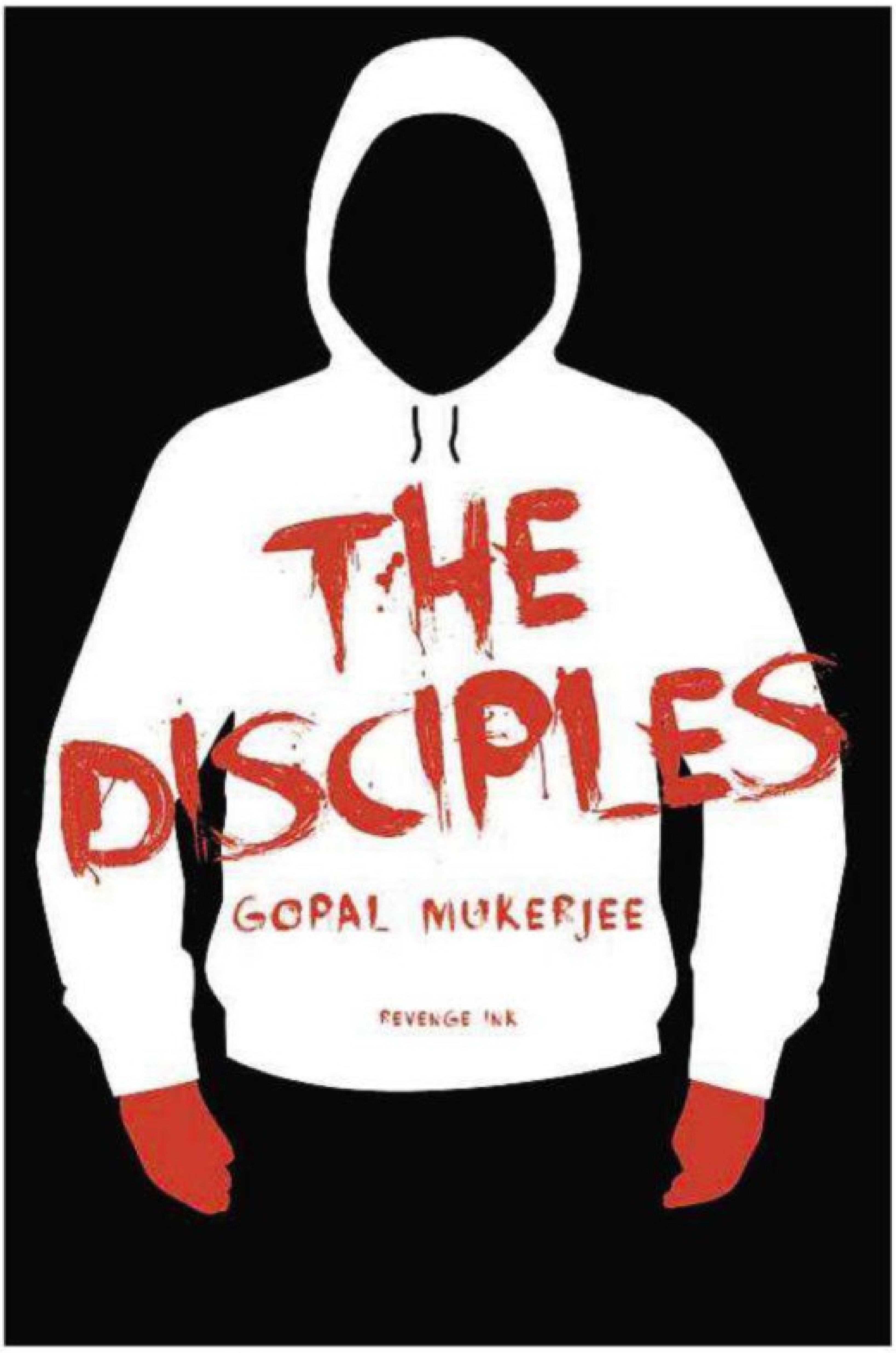
PRETTY IN PINK

Sisters Jasmine and Summer Stanley were playing in their garden in Havant, Hampshire, in July 2010 when they noticed a pink grasshopper. They caught it and put it on display in their Leigh Park home. It shed its skin the following day, leaving a replica of itself in the box. Prof. Richard Greenwood of the University of Portsmouth's biological sciences department said: "There are a lot of variations in grasshoppers and pink ones crop up from time to time." (*FT* saw a Scottish case around eight or nine years ago but never found space to report it then.)

Another pink grasshopper, about an inch (2.5cm) long, was observed in September in the Rushbed Woods nature reserve in Buckinghamshire. "My daughter Nicola saw it first," said walker Martin Rogers. "She squealed, 'Look, that flower is moving' as it jumped between the red flowers – presumably for camouflage." *The News (Portsmouth), 8 July; Metro, 13 Sept 2010.*

REVENGE INK

THIS HALLOWEEN, READ YOUR WAY TO THE DARKSIDE



THE DISCIPLES: A NOVEL FOR THE APOCALYPSE, GOPAL MUKERJEE (CO-FOUNDER REVENGE INK)

ISBN 978-0-9565119-5-9
RELEASE: OCTOBER 31, 2011 PRICE: £7.99

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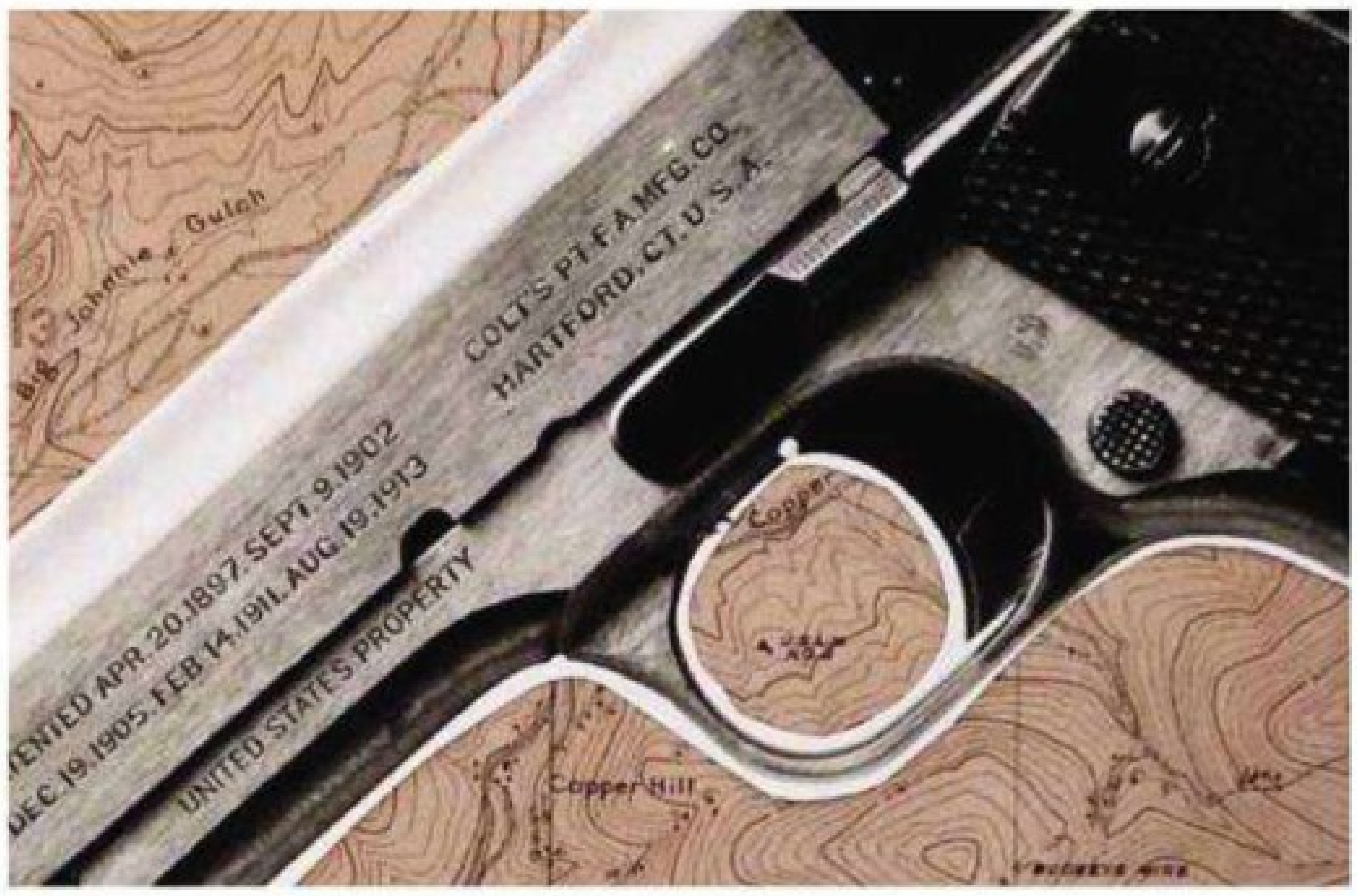
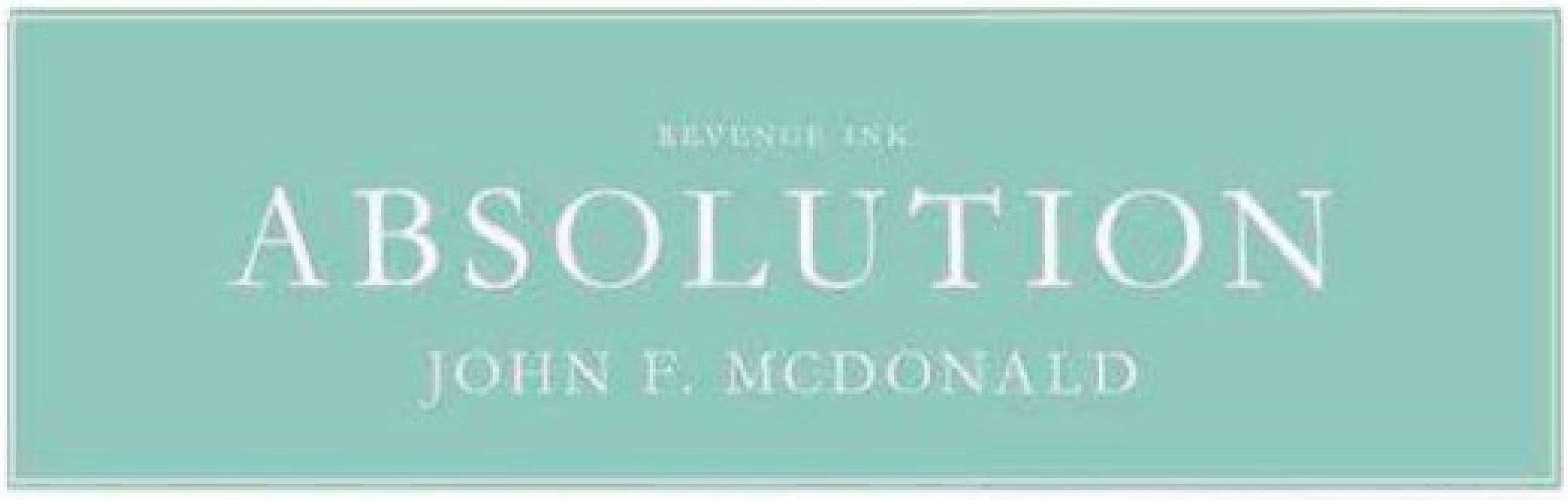


ABSOLUTION, JOHN F MCDONALD

ISBN 978-0-9565119-4-2
RELEASE: SEP 22, 2011 PRICE: £7.99

From the co-author of bestselling memoir **Borstal Girl** comes a densely researched thriller about terrorism and fundamentalism in *all* their forms. When Mohammed Sharif from Kashmir finds a 'miracle' emerald in Burma, he takes it to his new friend, Christian Childe, an English financial trader in Bangkok. They seek out Daniel Hutten, a Jewish gemstone expert from New York. But will these unlikely friends find peace? Or will their pasts return to haunt them? Read this and find out.



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Irish coroner: It's SHC!

Decision recognises Spontaneous Combustion as official cause of death

THE SUN / NI SYNDICATION

On 22 September, a coroner declared that the death of a 76-year-old man in County Galway was a case of SHC (spontaneous human combustion), allegedly the first ever recorded in Ireland.

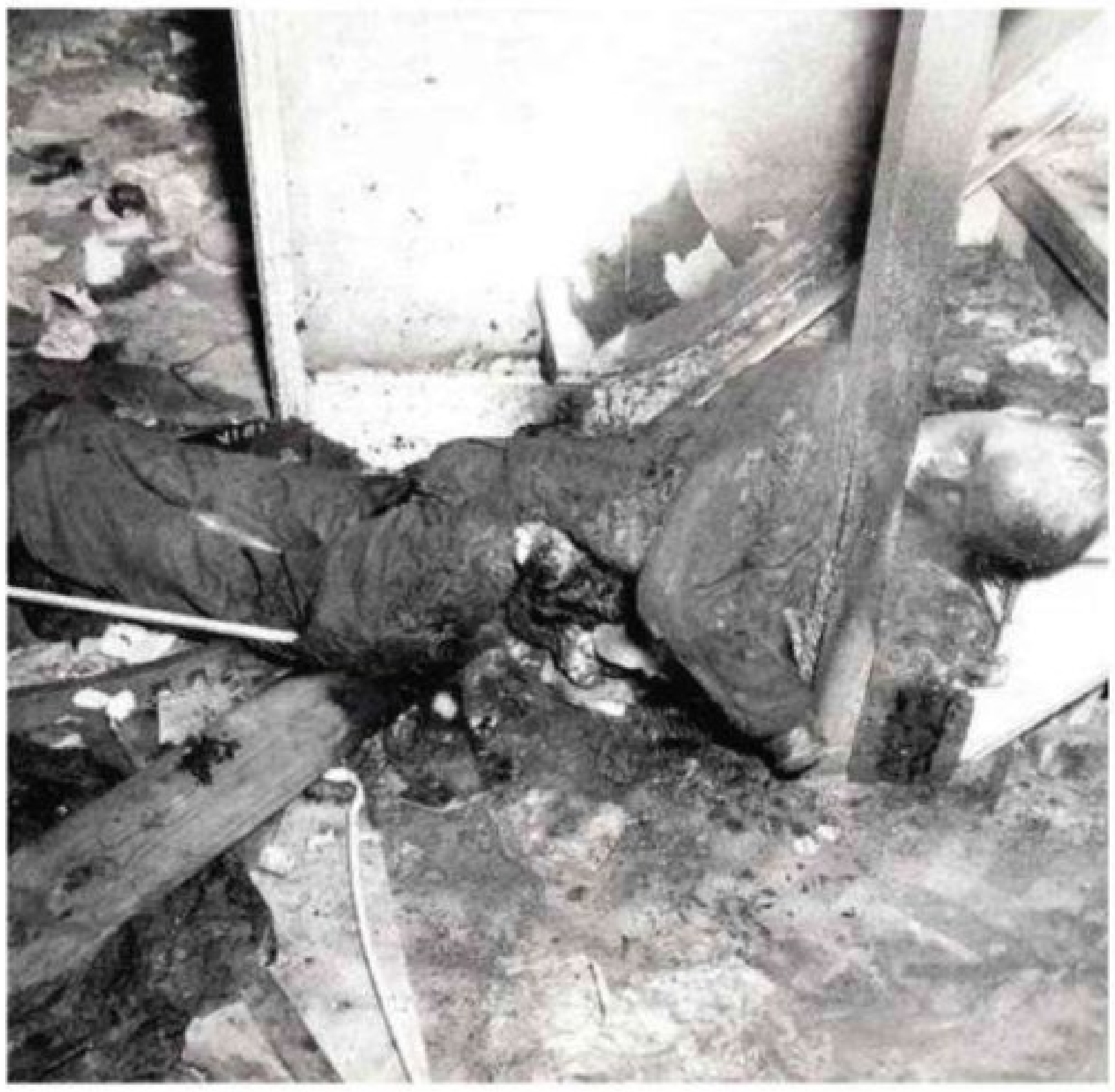
Michael Faherty – also known as Micheal O Fatharta – originally from Connemara, died at his house at 64 Clareview Park, Ballybane, Galway, on 22 December 2010. West Galway coroner Dr Ciarán McLoughlin said he had never encountered such a case in the 25 years that he had been investigating deaths in the region. After a thorough investigation, forensic experts found that a fire in the fireplace of the sitting room where the badly burnt body was found did not cause the blaze that consumed Mr Faherty. No trace of an accelerant had been found and nothing suggested foul play, or that anyone else had entered or left the house that night.

Garda Gerard O'Callaghan said he had gone to the house after the fire had been put out and found Mr Faherty lying on his back in a small sitting room, with his head closest to an open fireplace. He said the fire had been confined to the sitting room and the rest of the house sustained only smoke damage. The only damage was to the body, which had been totally burnt, the ceiling above the body and the floor underneath.

A blue flame was issuing from a slit in his abdomen

The alarm had been raised by a neighbour, Tom Mannion, when a smoke alarm in his house went off at about 3am. Assistant chief fire officer Gerry O'Malley said that two experienced fire officers believed the fire had not spread from the fireplace, and could not determine the cause of the blaze. Pathologist Prof. Grace Callagy said Mr Faherty had last been seen two to three days before his body was found. She said it had not been possible to determine the cause of death because of the extent of damage to the organs. She noted that he had suffered from Type 2 diabetes and hypertension but concluded he had not died from heart failure. (How she could tell when the body was "totally burnt" is problematic.)

Dr McLoughlin said he had consulted medical textbooks and carried out other research in an attempt to find an explanation. He said Prof. Bernard Knight, in his book on forensic pathology, had written about spontaneous combustion and noted that such reported cases were almost always near an open fireplace or chimney. (However, scholars of SHC will be familiar with some well-known examples where this is not the case.) "This fire was thoroughly investigated and I'm left with the conclusion that this fits into the category of spontaneous human combustion, for which there is no adequate explanation," he said. *Irish Times, Belfast Telegraph, 23 Sept 2011.*



TOP: The home of Michael Faherty in Ballybane, Galway, where his burnt corpse was discovered. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The remains of John Francis Bailey, known as Bailey the Tramp, found still aflame in Lambeth in 1967. **FACING PAGE:** All that was left of Miss Annie Webb in Newport, Gwent, in February 1980.

Spontaneous human combustion describes cases of a living human body being burnt without an apparent external source of ignition. Bodies are often reduced to greasy ashes, perhaps leaving a hand or foot, while nearby material such as soft furnishings are left unscathed. One feature often noted is that victims seldom cry out or struggle, as if they are in some kind of trance. The phenomenon has been the subject of heated scientific argument for centuries. Since the work of Lavoisier and Davy on the theory of combustion, the very idea of SHC has been regarded as preposterous, and the standard medical textbooks deny its existence, despite the hundreds of cases that have impressed firemen and police and vexed coroners attempting to ascribe cause of death. Many instances of SHC lead to open verdicts, as coroners have no desire to be associated with such bizarre and 'unscientific' events. If there is no crime, there is no need to make much enquiry. For this reason, SHC is probably much more common than the record of cases would lead people to believe. A Dr David Price stated in the 1990s that he encountered a case roughly every four years.

SHC features in the works of Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving, Thomas de Quincey, Mark Twain, Jules Verne, Melville, Zola and Balzac. Many first heard of the phenomenon

in the case of Countess Cornelia Bandi of Casena, Italy, of whom only a head, three fingers and both legs were found in a heap of ashes in 1731. Frederick Marryat used details from a *Times* report of 1832 to describe the death of his hero's mother, who is reduced to "a sort of unctious pitchy cinder" in *Jacob Faithful* (1833). Charles Dickens killed off his drunken rag-and-bone dealer Krook in *Bleak House* (1853) by means of SHC, investing the event with moral significance. "It is the same death eternally – inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupt humours of the vicious body itself…" The death recalls the details of an inquest into a fiery death attended by Dickens as a young reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*, 20 years earlier. GH Lewes, George Eliot's lover, took issue with Dickens and declared SHC impossible, so in his preface to *Bleak House* Dickens cites 30 examples of SHC from press reports.

The first medical writer to consider SHC seriously and objectively was the Danish anatomist Thomas Bartholin. In his book *Acta* (1673), he described the case of a Parisian woman reportedly found reduced to ashes except for her head and fingertips. The straw mattress on which she slept was said to be unmarked by the fire. In 1725, Nicole Millet was found burnt to death in Rheims in an unburnt armchair; her husband was accused of her murder, but the court was persuaded that the death was a case of SHC. This inspired Jonas Dupont to gather together all the available evidence for SHC, which he published in his book *De Incendiis Corporis Humani Spontaneis* (Leyden 1763).

A popular theory in the 19th century, reminiscent of the ancient belief that all deaths by fire and lightning were signs of divine retribution, was that SHC victims were drunkards who had somehow saturated their bodies with inflammable spirits. This is, of course, chemical nonsense, and not even the most enthusiastic debunker holds this position today. The drinker would die of alcohol poisoning before reaching an inflammable condition.

Sceptics usually cite the so-called "candle effect"

Various explanations of SHC have been put forward in the last century, involving intestinal methane ignited by enzymes, static electricity, phosphagens in muscle tissue, geomagnetic phenomena, unspecified biochemical action, or the Manipura chakra (the fire centre) running out of control; but all remain unsupported by actual evidence.

Sceptics usually cite the so-called "candle effect", in which body fat is the fuel and the victim's clothing the wick, a hypothesis propounded by Prof. David Gee of Leeds University in the 1980s. In this scenario, the victim is either smoking or is next to a fire when he or she collapses. The burning clothes of the victim boil off the body's water and the fat soaks into the clothing, which then acts as a wick. "Of course, when it gets to the knees," said Prof. Gee, "the clothing effectively ends. And that's why the extreme end of the body is rarely damaged."

The wick hypothesis was tested in a 1998 episode of BBC TV's science series *QED* [**FT116:58**]. A forensic specialist wrapped a dead pig in a blanket and placed it in a replica living room. A small amount of petrol was poured on one shoulder and set alight. Five hours later, the "body" was still burning and would have continued had it not been doused. This showed that a prolonged low-intensity blaze could reproduce some of the characteristics of SHC: the pig's extremities were intact and the bones were friable, crumbling when poked. Effects in the room were localised: a plastic radio partly melted and a wooden table was lightly scorched.

However, this leaves many questions about reported SHC cases unanswered. Not all victims are smokers or near some other source of ignition. Head and hands are often reduced to ashes. (In the famous example of Mary Reeser in 1951, her skull had shrunk to the size of a fist.) Intact clothing sometimes encloses burnt flesh – for example, Dr ES Reynolds wrote of a woman's legs carbonised *inside* her unscathed stockings (*British Medical Journal*, 21 Mar 1891). What's more, ignition of *living* tissue by sparks or smouldering cloth is extremely difficult as it has a water content of 72 per cent and an active blood supply to redistribute the heat.

For Larry E Arnold, author of *Ablaze!* (1996 – **FT88:32–33**), a detailed study of SHC bursting with case histories, the chief characteristic of "true" SHC is that the fire originates within the body and burns outwards – a reversal of a conventional death by fire. He describes some non-fatal cases of SHC and observes that "survivors of partial internal immolation pose a *profound* challenge to the debunker." Examples are given in *Annales de la Société d'Agriculture du Puy*, 1827, pp94–112 [translated in **FT50:52–55**], and by the Hierophant's Apprentice in the "Random Dictionary of the Damned" entry on SHC [**FT187:41**].

After studying the charred remains of 73-year-old Henry Thomas in Ebbw Vale in 1980, John Heymer, a Scenes of Crime Officer for Gwent CID, came to the same conclusion as Arnold. In his book *The Entrancing Flame* (1996), Heymer details many British cases he had investigated. One concerns the death of a tramp known as Bailey in a derelict house in Lambeth, south London, on 13 September 1967 [**FT75:38**]. A fire crew led by Jack Stacey was called out to a small fire on the first floor. In 1986 Stacey described to Heymer the most bizarre sight of his career. "There was a 4in [10cm] slit in his abdomen from which was issuing, at force, a blue flame which was beginning to burn the wooden stairs," he said. "We extinguished the flames by playing a hose into the abdominal cavity. Bailey was alive when he started burning and must have been in terrible pain. His teeth were sunk into the mahogany newel post of the staircase."

In their book *Spontaneous Human Combustion* (1992), Jenny Randles and Peter Hough cite an apparent example of the same phenomenon. An Army patrol, crossing a field in Dorset in World War II, witnessed a sheep bursting into flames. They believed it was already dead but "in no way decomposed"; as it lay on its side "from its stomach issued blue flames".

For further discussion of SHC, see **FT63:44–50, 74:29–32, 75:37–40, 79:40–43, 187:39–42**; Rickard & Michell: *The Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena*, pp185–190. The most recent fires noted in *Fortean Times* where SHC was suggested were in Sweden in 2002 and Romania in 2003 [**FT171:20**].

Paul Sieveking

MATT PATTINSON

PROVING THE EARTH IS FLAT

Theoretical modelling and experiment are the cornerstones of the scientific method, but, as **DAVID HAMBLING** explains, results don't always supply the answers you're looking for.

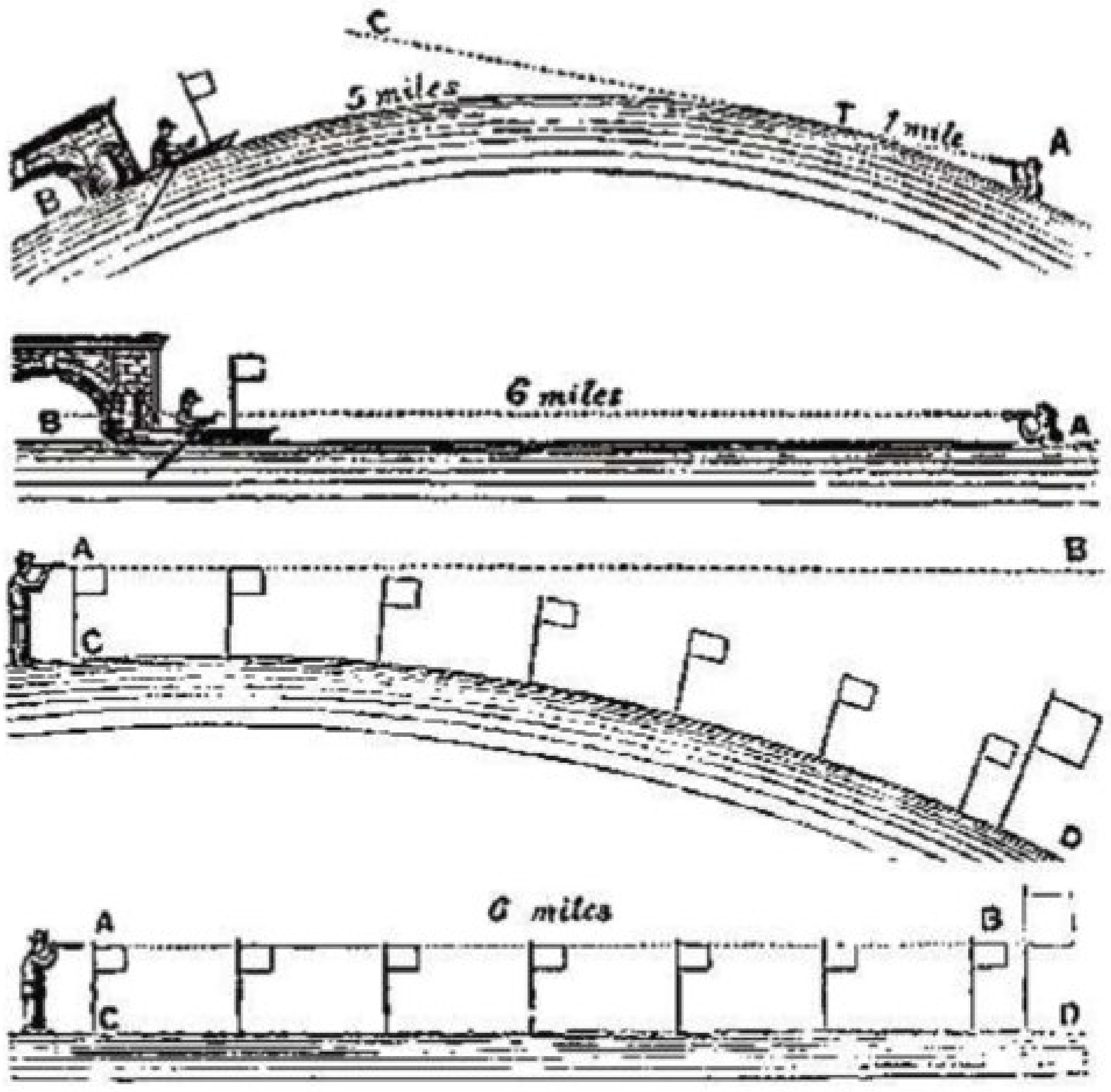
The latest results from the Large Hadron Collider threaten the most popular theoretical model of the Universe, and scientists may be forced to reconsider the number of dimensions.[1] This sort of science is now a spectator sport. Researchers carry out their projects, the media then oversimplify and exaggerate their findings, and the rest of us wonder what to make of it. However, one thing we can learn from history is that even carefully designed experiments do not necessarily show what their instigators claim.

There are some good examples from the field of Flat-Earth research, an area where a longstanding controversy has been conclusively resolved… for most people, anyway. But for years experimental results seemed to favour Flat-Earth 'Planists' against the 'Globularist' Round-Earthers.

Samuel Rowbotham carried out a series of tests at the Old Bedford River on the Cambridgeshire-Norfolk border from 1838 onwards. This stretch, known as the Levels, was constructed by the Dutch engineer Vermuyden for drainage and is perfectly straight. The surface of the water should therefore be perfectly flat, if you're a Planist, or a perfect curve if you're a Globularist.

Looking down the surface of the canal with a telescope, Rowbotham found that he could clearly see barges six miles (9.7km) away.[2] This was impossible according to the Globularists, as the barges should have been hidden by the curve of the Earth. Rowbotham used this and other observations in his book *Zetetic Astronomy: Earth Not a Globe*.[3]

The matter was put to the test some years later, when dedicated Planist John Hampden wagered £500 that the flatness of the Earth could be experimentally proven. His bet was taken by Alfred Russel Wallace, the naturalist and co-discoverer of evolution by natural selection. Wallace had lost money on some bad investments and hoped to make good his losses while humiliating the 'anti-science' Planists.



ABOVE: Line-of-sight observations along the flat surface of a canal were claimed as proof of the Flat Earth theory, but atmospheric refraction had not been considered.

ILLUSTRATION FROM *ZETETIC ASTRONOMY: EARTH NOT A GLOBE*

Three markers were placed on poles at the same height above the water over six miles (9.7km). Sighting from the first marker, it was obvious that the other two markers were not at the same level. Wallace believed that this proved the Earth was curved; Hampden was equally adamant that the effect was caused by perspective. Parallel rail lines appear to converge in the distance, the Planists argued, and this was the same sort of illusion.

The argument got unpleasant, and although Wallace eventually won, Hampden continued to harass him in public. Wallace took out lawsuits against Hampden for defamation; he won, but the exercise cost him more money than he made.

Thirty-five years later, Lady Blount, another prominent Planist, attempted to prove the Planist view with another demonstration. Echoing Rowbotham's original observations, Lady Blount hung a sheet 15ft (4.6m) square from Bedford Bridge, its edge just above the water. A photographer called Clifton took a picture from six miles (9.7km) away using the latest photo-telescopic camera, and was surprised to see that the entire sheet was visible. Globularist theory suggested the bottom of the sheet should have been 20ft (6m) below the line of sight. The photograph was widely published, much to the bafflement and fury of the Flat-Earthers' opponents.

Rowbotham could clearly see barges six miles along the canal

The explanation of these results is now accepted to be refraction: temperature differences between the warm air and the cooler water cause light rays to bend. The result is a superior mirage, which makes distant objects visible, a factor not taken into account by either side when the experiments were set up.

Another experimental approach in *Zetetic Astronomy* involved firing a cannonball vertically upwards.[4] If, as Globularists insist, the Earth rotates once every 24 hours, then we are spinning at over 1,000mph (1,600km/h). The Earth ought to have moved a mile (1.6km) more by the time the cannonball comes down. Rowbotham described trials in which this was tried and "several times the ball fell back upon the mouth of the cannon".

This was a variant of a thought experiment suggested by Galileo in 1632, involving dropping a cannonball from the mast of a ship, and seeing if the Earth's rotation causes the falling cannonball to miss the deck entirely. Galileo pointed out that the cannonball would be moving at the same speed as the ship, so however fast the ship is moving the cannonball will actually land at the base of the mast.

However, things are more complicated with cannonballs fired upwards from a spherical planet. If we are travelling at 1,000mph (1,600km/h) to remain stationary on the surface of the Earth, then something high above us has to be moving slightly faster, because it is describing a slightly larger circle in the same 24 hours. So a cannonball fired upwards should land slightly behind (to the west) of its launch point by a matter of a few metres and miss the cannon.[5]

The air above us is also moving at the right speed to keep it stationary above the surface, so the cannonball experiences a slight wind which somewhat offsets the rotation effect. In practice, the aiming as well as the cannon itself and the ball would have to be far more precise than was possible with the technology of the day. The degree of error involved was much greater than the effect being tested, so the actual experiment tells us nothing.

Flat-Earthers are conveniently easy to laugh at, but at least they devised experiments to prove their theories, and the experiments appeared to do so. Unfortunately for them, their results were just mirages – a warning to modern scientists trying to discover the shape of the Universe who might appear just as ridiculous in hindsight.

NOTES

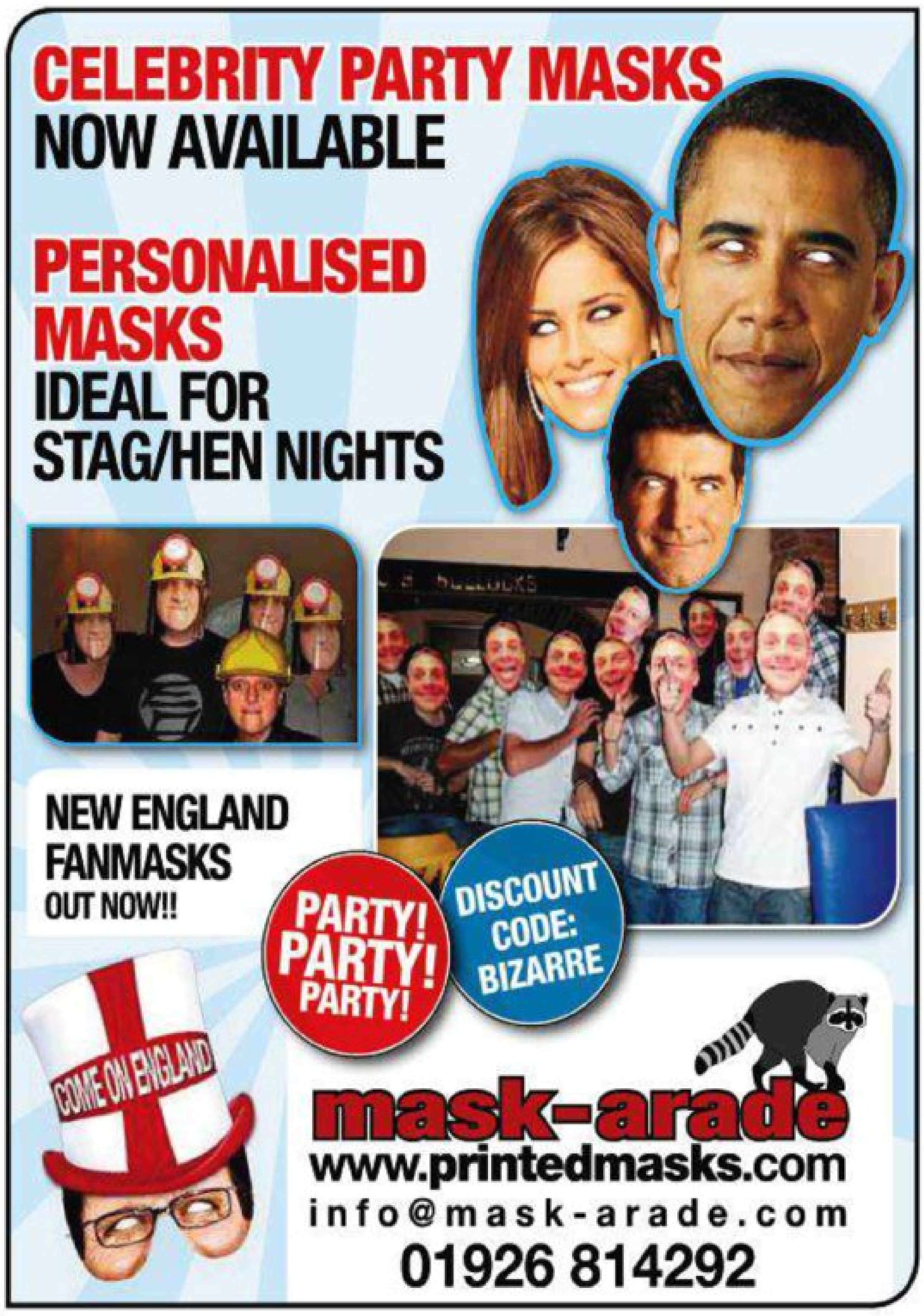
1 http://bbc.in/mYvZtD (BBC).

2 http://bit.ly/pzuyWh (welney.org.uk). See also "Loyalists of the Flat Earth" in John Michell's *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions* (1984, pp21–32) and the obituary of Flat-Earth Society president Charles Johnson, **FT147:26**.

3 Full text http://bit.ly/r9X7dE (sacred-texts.com).

4 Relevant chapter http://bit.ly/oX0GMu (sacred-texts.com).

5 Detailed discussion and calculation on Straight Dope: http://bit.ly/qzbvTB (boards.straightdope.com).



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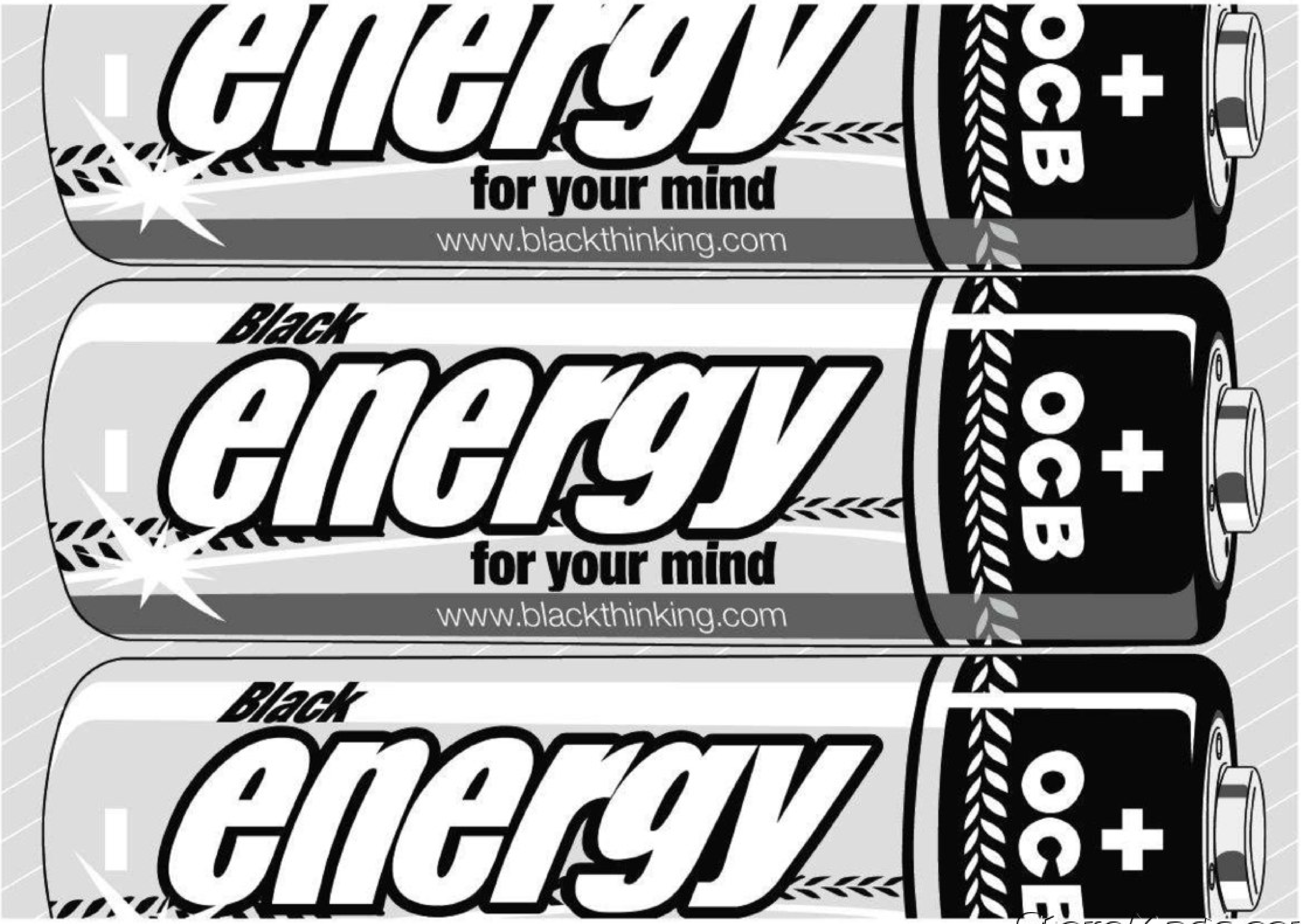
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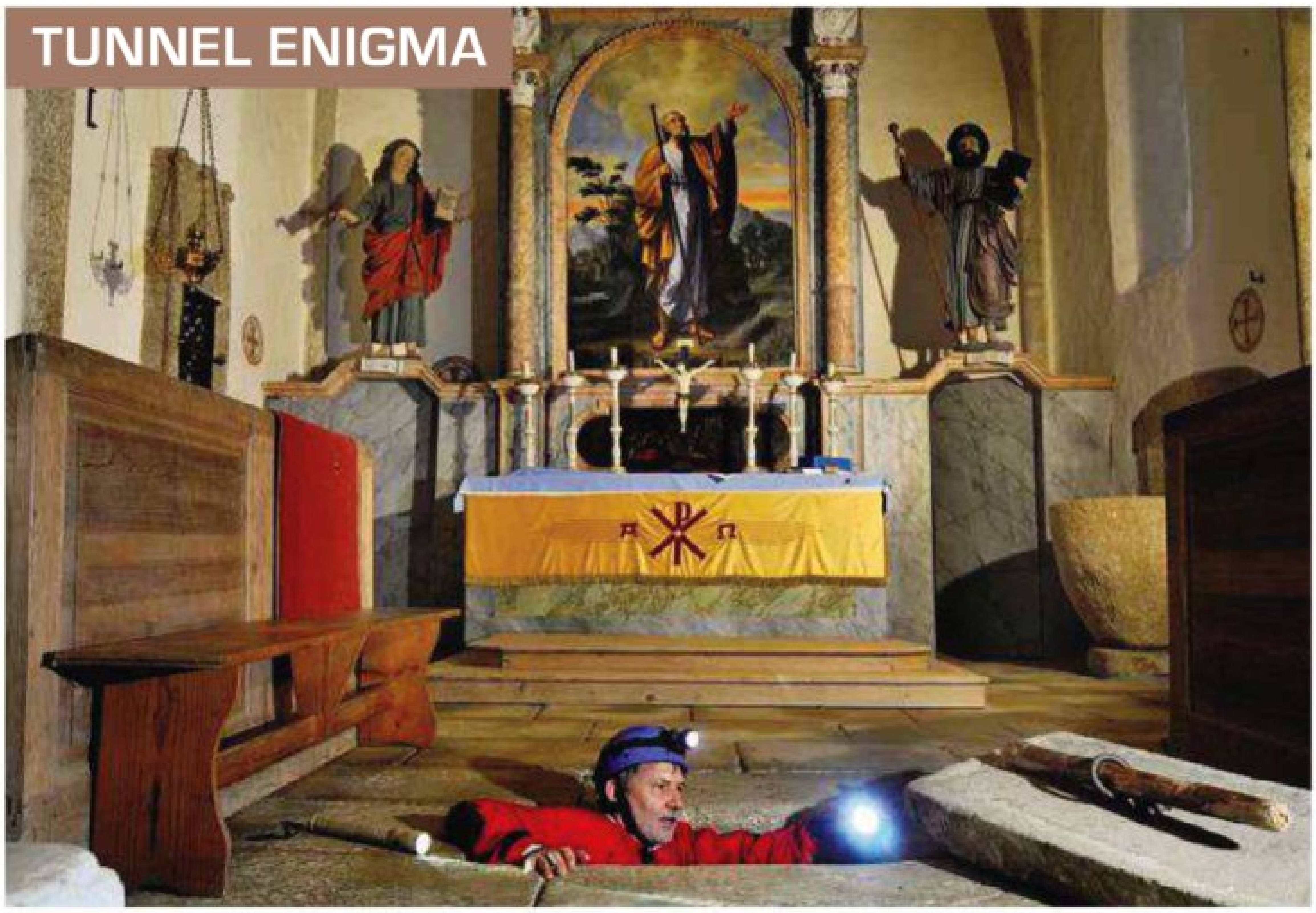
MATT PATTINSON

Ancient underground earthworks found in Bavaria, Austria and across much of Europe have never been fully explored or explained.

TUNNEL ENIGMA



BEN BEHNKE

An exhibition in Passau, Bavaria, is devoted to what it describes as "Central Europe's last great mystery" – hundreds of subterranean passages, labyrinths and chambers whose origin and purpose are unknown. These souterrains (as archæologists call them) are found from Hungary to Spain; there are at least 1,000 in Ireland – where they are often referred to as 'caves'. They are also found in parts of Scotland, Cornwall, and central France. There are at least 700 in Bavaria (where they are known as *Erdstall*) and about 500 in Austria. More continue to be discovered. Curiously, there appear to be none in Switzerland or the Black Forest.

In the Germanic region they have local folkloric names such as *Schrazelloch* (goblin hole) or *Alraunenhöhle* (mandrake cave), and were supposedly built by elves, or housed gnomes, or were part of escape tunnels from castles. However, they are often only 20–50m (65–164ft) long, and some are so small that they can only be explored on all fours.

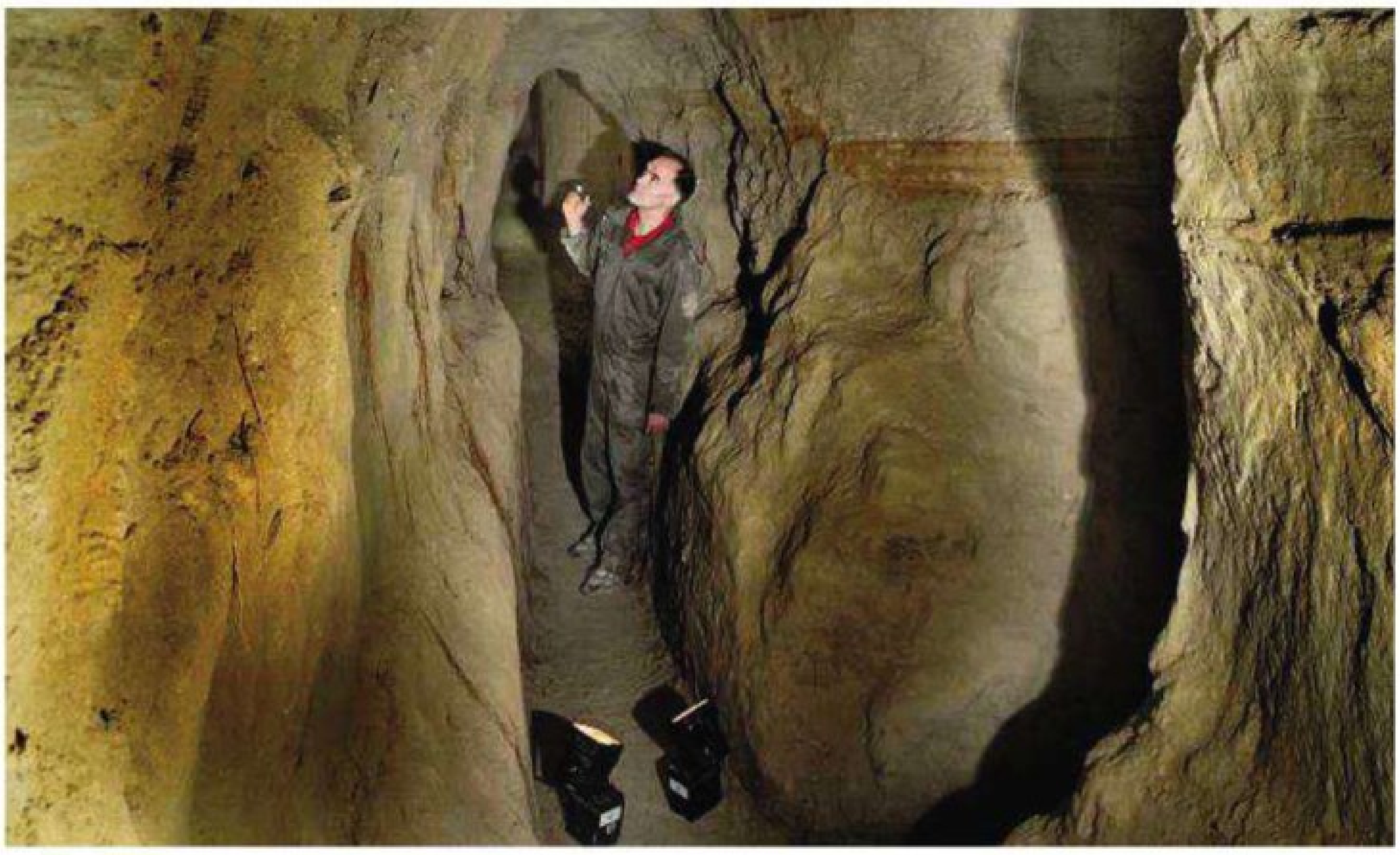
The tiniest, known as *Schlupfe* (slips), are barely 40cm (16in) in diameter. Many galleries are close to former settlement sites. Tunnel entrances are sometimes in the kitchens of old farmhouses, near churches and cemeteries, or in the middle of forests.

The pioneer of Erdstall exploration was a priest called Lambert Karner (1841–1909). He crawled through 400 of them, lit only by flickering candlelight, with "strange winding passages" through which "one can often only force oneself like a worm". Subsequent local historians speculated that they were used as "winter quarters for the Teutonic tribes", as dungeons for criminals or the disabled, as places of healing, or as ritual chambers built by Druids. Or were they prisons for demons, evil dwarves and the undead? Some galleries contain traces of building stones and remnants of doors or locks.

> Folklore claims the chambers are prisons for demons or evil dwarves

A sandstone relief found in an Erdstall at Bosenreutin near the town of Lindau on Lake Constance depicts a goblin with a tail attached to its rump. Heinrich Kusch, a prehistorian from Graz in Austria, believes that some Erdstall galleries are Neolithic, while others suggest many were dug during the *Völkerwanderung* (Migration Period) in the 5th and 6th centuries, when entire tribes left their homes and abandoned their cemeteries.

A more empirical approach is taken by the Working Group for Erdstall Research, headed by Dieter Ahlborn, which includes speliologists, geographers and engineers. All carbon-dating so far indicates that the central European souterrains date from the 10th to the 13th centuries AD, while those in Ireland date from the 6th to the 12th centuries. Bits of charcoal from the tunnels in Höcherlmühle in Bavaria date to between 950



BEN BEHNKE

TOP: Explorer Josef Weichenberger emerges from the Erdstall tunnels beneath the Wehrkirsche in Kleinzwettel, north Austria. **ABOVE:** Farmer Josef Wasmeier explores an Erdstall complex on his property in Unterholzen.

and 1050. Ahlborn speculates that they were built by itinerant monks who came to mainland Europe from Ireland and Scotland in the early mediæval period. Around 1200, many souterrains were filled in and their entrances blocked with rubble, which has been found to contain potsherds from the Gothic period.

Not a single doctoral thesis has been written on the subject of Erdstall galleries, which are still virtually unknown in academia. Josef Weichenberger, an Austrian archivist who has been exploring the galleries for 34 years, believes they were simply refuges from robbers and marauding Magyars in the turbulent 11th century, where farmers would hide with their valuables. Ahlborn disagrees. "Some galleries were indeed used as hiding places, but only much later," he said. "They were also used as lavatories and refuse pits." Edith Bednarik, an Austrian spelunker, points out that there are hardly any chambers large enough for people to stay in, there are no "emergency exits", for example in case of fire, and the smallest tunnels were too narrow for pregnant women. Besides, why did nothing ever fall out of anyone's pockets? There are no food remains or traces of torches.

The vaults could not have had any obvious practical purpose, such as dwellings or food stores, if only because they are so narrow in places, and some fill up with water in winter. A complete absence of fæces indicates they weren't used to house livestock either. One gallery contained an iron ploughshare, while heavy millstones were found in three others. Most, however, are completely empty and appear to have been swept clean, as if they were abodes for the spirits. Some speculate that they were places where the souls of the dead could await the Second Coming of Christ and the Day of Judgment. However, there is not a single written record of the construction of an Erdstall from the mediæval period.

Report by Matthias Schulz in *Der Spiegel*, 22 July 2011; "Isolated souterrains" in *Archaeological Survey of County Donegal*, 1983, p231. See also M Clinton: *The Souterrains of Ireland*, Wordwell, Bray, 2001.

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

143. THE OLD BILLS

(Or, Who What? – to adapt Lenin's (a good classicist) famous question.

Jerry Glover's admirably even-handed investigation [**FT280:32–37**] of the Shakespeare question has its classical equivalents. First though, two sources that may swing the balance back towards the Stratfordians.

Robert Greene's *A Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) fires this critical shaft: "There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide, supposes that he is well able to bumbast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a country."

Apart from the obvious onomastic pun, Greene closely parodies the line "A tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" (*Henry VI, Part 3*, Act 1, Scene 4). This shows that Shakespeare under his own name was making theatrical waves at the time.

John Aubrey (1626–97) was born only a decade after Bill's death. His *Brief Lives* includes Shakespeare. Apart from biographical details, Aubrey opines: "He began early to make essayes at Dramatique Poetry… his plays took well… his Comoedies will remain witt, as long as the English language is understood." Aubrey cites *Midsomer Night's Dreame* (sic – not to be confused with *Midsomer Murders*) and *Much Ado…* by title, also quoting Ben Jonson's riposte to Bill's claim "Never blotted out a line" – "I wish he had blotted-out a thousand."

Whether Aubrey's omission of the tragedies from his compliment (Shakespeare's universalism is favourably compared to the "particularity of our present writers") suggests doubts about their authenticity is impossible to say.

Another candidate for authorship may here emerge. Aubrey's Life of Sir William Davenant says he and Shakespeare were close friends, that Davenant himself wrote plays and poems and boasted in his cups that "he writt with the very spirit of Shakespeare, and seemed contented enough to be called his son."

The ancients also played this game. Lucian's sci-fi hero (*True Story*, bk2 ch20) chats with Homer (roughly equivalent to a Greek Shakespeare) about authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, clearly a joking allusion to contemporary scholarly disputes.

I subjoin Samuel Butler's notion that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman, an idea taken up (predictably) in Robert Graves's novel *Homer's Daughter*.

Contrariwise, Byzantine Marcellinus's biography of Thucydides (ch43) dismisses the suggestion that book 8 of Thucydides's *History* was penned by his daughter because any such intellectual feat was beyond a woman's power – don't hit me, ladies, *I* didn't say that!

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

ABOVE: Death mask thought by some to be that of William Shakespeare – though some say it is Ben Jonson.

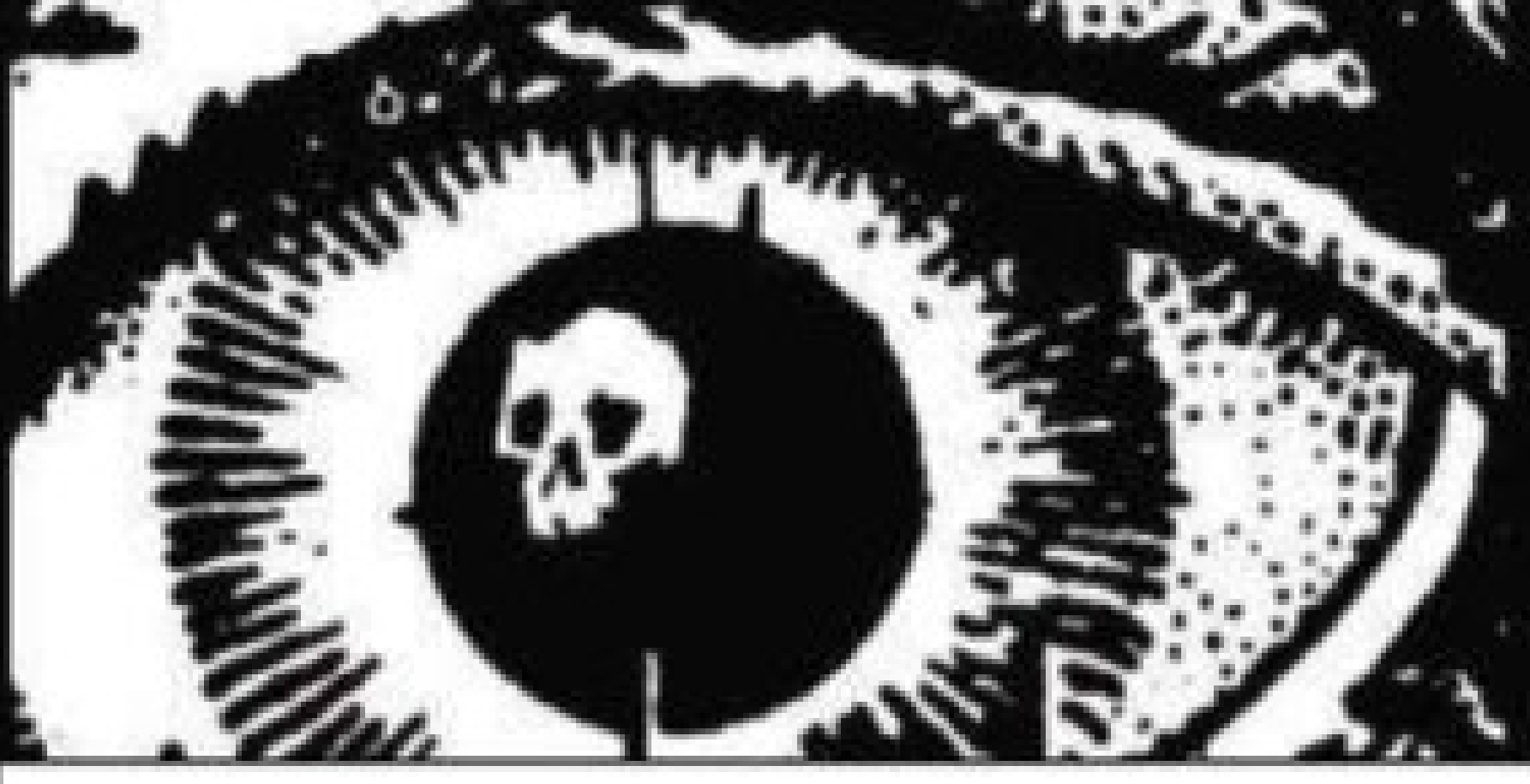
Marcellinus also ridicules the idea that Xenophon wrote it, just as moderns deny him authorship of a fifth-century pamphlet going under the name 'The Old Oligarch'.

Ancient lists of play titles by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides always vary, implying ancient quarrels over attributions. Many moderns deny Aeschylus the *Prometheus Bound* and Euripides the *Rhesus*.

The *Historia Augusta* (a title invented by Renaissance scholar Casaubon), a collection of Roman imperial biographies, is a notorious battleground. It purports to be the joint work of six (to us) utterly unknown writers – such teamwork was almost unknown in antiquity – in the late third/early fourth centuries. Nowadays, most (a few hold-outs subsist) attribute it to an individual hoaxer (the thing abounds in historical and literary fabrications) writing a century or so later (cf. the many books and articles by Ronald Syme).

Oddest of all, beginning with Voltaire, there have been half-a-dozen attempts to prove Tacitus's historical works forgeries, usually foisting them on to the Italian scholar Poggio Bracciolini, importing Arabic influence for good/bad measure. Most hilarious offenders were John William Ross (1878) and Pierre Hochart (1890) – full details in the online article "Tacitus and his Manuscripts", based on the work of John Bircher-classicist Revilo P Oliver (note his palindromic moniker). I've never met or read anyone who believed this stuff, but out there on the Internet there's bound to be someone…

"Or even Shakespeare, with all his inartistry, did not lug in King Lear to make Hamlet complete" – Fort, *Books*, p110



MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE uncovers a number of cases where unseen spirits showed a violent streak.

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS SYNDICATION

LEFT: Paranormal investigation team Dead Connections were called in to examine Holly Taylor's poltergeist case in Wigan.

PHANTOMS GET PHYSICAL

There seems to have been an upsurge in violent and frightening ghost and poltergeist cases over the last year, both before and since the well-publicised Coventry case in March 2011 where a poltergeist reportedly wrecked a home and killed a dog [**FT276:12–13**]. Stories from Britain, Australia and Malaysia feature 'bedroom invaders', violent and incendiary poltergeists and mixed haunting/poltergeist phenomena scaring people at work.

On 30 September 2010, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported the story of a woman claiming to have been attacked in her bed by an invisible entity. Jennifer Mills-Young of Durack, who lives near Darwin in the Northern Territory, claimed a ghost she calls 'Kevin' tried to drag her out of her bed. Initially, she thought it was her husband making an amorous advance, but then she remembered he was away. She swore at the invisible presence and it released her and, when the bedroom door seemed to shut of its own accord, Ms Mills-Young jumped up and locked it. Previously a sceptic, she had noticed an uncomfortable atmosphere in the house when she had moved in with her family, but the only other alleged phenomenon mentioned was a strange shadow seen by her daughter. An amateur psychic investigator from the organisation Unexplained Australia was looking into the case.

Two months later, in Britain in December 2010, student midwife Holly Taylor, 22, and her two-year-old daughter were being frightened by a poltergeist at their home in Ormskirk Road, Wigan. Phenomena included objects flying off walls, lights being switched on after she had gone to bed, plates being smashed in the kitchen, a smoke alarm going off randomly, and unexplained sounds of footsteps. Holly had ceased staying in the flat with her daughter, commenting: "I love this place and don't want to move, but something needs to be done to give me peace." The building is the site of an old police station allegedly haunted by an entity known as "Bert the ghost", reputedly an inspector who hanged himself. *Wigan Today, 3 Dec; Metro, 8 Dec 2010*.

Objects flew from walls, plates were smashed and footsteps heard

In February 2011, French musician Jean Marc Mariole, 64, and his former model wife Charlotte, 53, fled from their home in Frodsham, Cheshire, having lived there less than a year. Mr Mariole told of having someone breathing down his neck as he practised the piano, and both heard strange banging sounds in the night and witnessed levitating bed-sheets. "It's terrifying," said Charlotte. "We see black silhouettes on the walls and hear screams at night. Sometimes it sounds like a grown man crying."

The worst incident she experienced was being suddenly trapped in the bathroom by the door slamming shut and locking itself, followed by the shower curtain moving of its own accord. After an exorcism failed to halt the disturbances, the couple stayed in hotels, reportedly spending £3,000 before abandoning their home altogether and returning to France. Their fears might well have been heightened by CCTV footage of 'orbs' floating in their hallway – in fact digital cameras may record these in any dusty environment. The press claimed that two suicides had occurred near the flat, but attempts by the Society for Psychical Research to elicit more information failed. *D.Mail, 28 Feb 2011*.

One month later, Gaynor Issit, 52, of Braunstone, Leicestershire, was reported to be suffering violent assaults from "ghoulish fists punching her face and stomach" and of being pushed downstairs by malevolent spirits in her home. "I can't even escape them when I leave," she said. "They pester me at ASDA and followed me to Lanzarote." Nor had Gaynor been the only one to suffer a physical attack. A friend, Lee Belton, woke up with black eyes after staying in the property. Spontaneous fires blamed on the presences had also occurred, with furniture catching alight. *Sun, 31 Mar 2011*.

A fortnight later, Emma Keitch and partner Jamie Owen fled with their baby of four months from their Chaucer Street home in Hull after experiencing a poltergeist. Stereos switched on by themselves, pictures spun on walls and a plank of wood was thrown. The word "move" was also found written in condensation on a bedroom mirror. Paranormal investigators who visited the house were also shaken by what they witnessed. "I have done many investigations but this was one of the worst ever," said Steve Kneeshaw. "It even freaked me out." His statement came after he and colleagues Elliot Ainsley and Kellie Taylor saw objects move, including the throwing of a remote control and the disturbance of bed clothes. After trying glass divination (presumably a Ouija board – nothing like adding fuel to the flames, some might say!) Kellie experienced her face being slapped, causing her to leave. The disturbances were attributed to the discarnate spirits of a mother and baby "Rachel" and "Sarah", who supposedly died in the house (though independent corroboration of their one-time existence doesn't seem to have been obtained). Tom Willis, a retired Church of England priest, was set to carry out an exorcism. *MX News (Sydney), 12 April; D.Star, 12 April 2011*.

Meanwhile, reports of a poltergeist incendiary at work in a Malaysian village drew attention from Australian psychic investigator and *FT* correspondent Paul Cropper. From December 2010, mysterious fires blamed on an evil spirit or *djinni* broke out at the home of Zainab Sulaiman, 75. With exemplary investigative zeal, Paul flew over to look into the phenomena (see pp40–44 for the full story). Paul's interest came as a relief to Zainab, who had sought help from exorcists, from Chinese sufi mystics and *bomohs* (traditional healers and exorcists). Malaysia has a rich folklore of malevolent ghostly entities and complex rituals used by magicians to combat them – see Richard Winstedt: *The Malay Magician: Being*

Shaman, Siva and Sufi (1951); *The Star online (Malaysia), 21 Feb 2011*.

Interestingly, both England and Malaysia shared stories of renovation-related hauntings sparking fear, with both cases involving buildings that have been used as courts, taking place within a month of each other. In England in February 2011, builders undertaking a £1.3 million refurbishment at Salisbury's Guildhall were described as having been 'spooked' by strange sounds, including knocking noises, footsteps and a sense of being watched. The building dates from 1795 and was used as a courthouse up until last year. It is now being transformed into an arts centre. *Western Daily Press, 15 Feb 2011*. (See also Peter McCue: "Renovation Hauntings", **FT268:30–35**.)

Meanwhile, in Jalan Bukit Meldrum, Malaysia, a *bomoh* was also called in to cleanse a 30-storey building known as the Menara Cyberport, which since January 2011 has contained eight of the city's civil courts and offices of the Ministry of Health. Soon after the opening of their new court complex, lawyers and court staff were alarmed by doors opening and closing by themselves, and by strange apparitions. One worker at the building collapsed in hysterics after brushing into a ghost that materialised inside her office.

Their claims were backed by former Bar Chairman K Balarajah, who was quoted as saying: "I received at least three complaints from lawyers about strange occurrences and sightings at the building," and added that judges had also expressed uneasiness about manifestations.

The ghostly incidents only began at the building after the change of use, according to a local policeman who acted as a medium to expel the "dozens of spirits and ghosts". Perhaps in both cases these are examples of the mixed poltergeist and haunting phenomena which are typically place-centred rather than person-centred, with disturbance of the physical environment contributing to or triggering the outbreak of manifestations. *The Star (Malaysia) 11 Mar 2011*.

Only in one recently reported case do the people visited by a poltergeist seem to have reacted in a calm and relaxed fashion. A poltergeist was claimed in June 2011 to be haunting a cafe in Cardoss, Dunbartonshire, Scotland.

Laura McKirdy and her mother Fiona who run the cafe both believe in the presence but are not unduly disturbed. Laura said: "I had just locked the door one evening when a jar of lollipops went crashing to the floor. I thought I'd just pick them all up in the morning but, when I came back, they were back in the jar and standing upright." Other strange happenings include sweets moving on their own, pictures falling off the wall and crumbs appearing on newly wiped tables. Strange noises of "the sound of legs moving under a table" when no customer was present have also been heard.

A member of the Scottish Society for Psychical Research was carrying out an investigation. Laura and her mother consider the presence to be female, stating: "She doesn't seem to mean any harm. She's a very friendly ghost – I wouldn't stay here if she wasn't." Locals talk of a spirit known as 'Nanny Goony', but who she is (it sounds like a traditional nickname for a witch) or why she should be troubling a cafe remain matters for conjecture. *D.Record, 25 June 2011*.

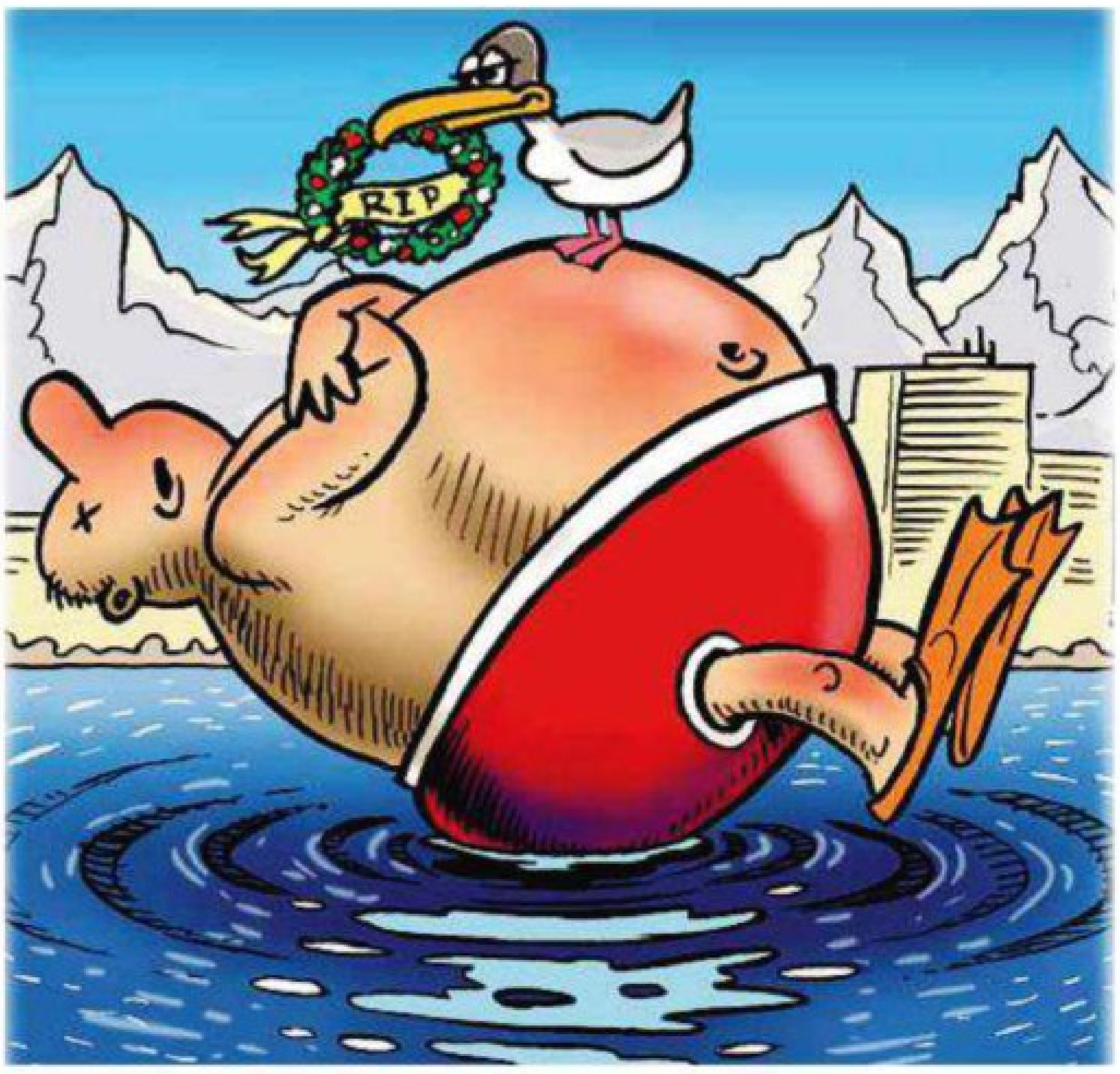
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

147. DEAD SEA DROWNING

The myth

You can't drown in the Dead Sea – the high concentration of salt in the water produces such buoyancy that it is impossible for a human body to sink.



HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

In 2010, 21 swimmers on the Israeli side of the Dead Sea had to be saved from drowning by lifeguards, and a quarter of all "recent" drownings in Israeli waters have been in the Dead Sea, according to the MDA, Israel's national disaster and rescue service. Instead of swimming below the surface with your head above it, as in a normal ocean, in the Dead Sea – which is 10 times saltier – most of you is floating on top of the water. This does, indeed, more or less rule out *sinking*. But it's precisely that which makes the place so deadly. In normal waters, if a swimmer gets his face in the water he/she can right himself by pushing down with his legs, or use his/her arms to roll over. In the buoyancy of the Dead Sea, this is extremely difficult. Experienced bathers take care to stay on their backs; those who, through misadventure or misjudgement, turn onto their fronts are the ones who get into distress.

Sources

http://bit.ly/cawZlo (jpost.com); http://bit.ly/aqTk06 (ynetnews.com); http://bit.ly/pFXtm4 (mdais.com); http://on.io9.com/mj46fJ (io9.com).

Disclaimer

I remind readers that this column never claims final correctness on any matter; disputations via the letters page are positively encouraged.

Mythchaser

Here's another entry to our growing list (see **FT152:26**, **180:26**, **225:17**, **257:19**) of celebrities who claim to have entered lookalike competitions (or similar) as themselves, and failed to win. According to *A word in your shell-like* by Nigel Rees (Collins, 2006), the British entertainer Max Bygraves "once went into a competition for Max Bygraves impressionists – and came fifth." Fifth place is very modest; it's usually third.

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

Knights Templar hijacked

Following Anders Behring Breivik's killing spree, **ANGELA KENNEDY** asks if there could be any truth in the Norwegian's claim to be part of a network of modern 'Knights Templar'.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / JON-ARE BERG JACOBSEN

On a sunny day in late July, death stalked Norway in the tall, blond form of 32-year-old self-proclaimed Knight Templar, Anders Behring Breivik. After shedding blood in the capital with a homemade fertiliser bomb, he unleashed such slaughter upon a nearby holiday island that it resembled the goriest of Hollywood horror films. But the teenage screams of pain and cries for mercy in Breivik's fantasy were horribly real.

Survivors reported cowering under beds and behind rocks in abject terror as Breivik, dressed as a police officer, called the youngsters to him promising safety – only then to laugh manically, yelling "You all must die!" as he sprayed them with bullets.

Until Breivik's deathly visitation, the summer camp on Utoeya Island was a relaxed gathering for Norway's Labour Youth movement. The killer surrendered to police 90 minutes after his two-gun massacre started. But it took days for rescuers to search the water and rocky shoreline around the island to discover all the corpses he had left behind.

Murdering eight people in his bombing of government buildings in Oslo, he gunned down 69, mostly teenagers, at the Utoeya camp. More than 150 people were injured in both attacks. Reports at the time suggested up to 95 people had been killed, reflecting the panic and confusion surrounding this unprecedented event – the worst peacetime atrocity in Norwegian history. Breivik admitted his crimes but denies criminal responsibility, calling his actions 'necessary'. He described his purpose as being to save Norway and Western Europe from Muslim domination, saying Norway's ruling Labour Party had to 'pay the price' for letting down the Norwegian people.

To explain his lack of remorse for the 22 July slaughter, Breivik claims he is a modern day Crusader. As part of a newly-formed order of the Knights Templar "warrior monks", he is supposedly fighting to save Western Europe from the clutches of multiculturalism, specifically Islam, and also from 'cultural Marxism'.

His chilling far-right ideology is outlined in a self-eulogising 1,500-page manifesto entitled *2083 – A European Declaration of Independence*, so called because he believes his fight will continue until 2083. He published the manifesto on the Internet and emailed it to his Facebook friends on the day of the attacks, under the anglicised pseudonym of Andrew Berwick.

He calls the new Templars a 'Christian military order'

2083

nationalism in Western Europe is being crushed, he nicknames Europe both the 'EUSSR' and 'Eurabia'.

Although he admits to not being particularly religious, he describes the desire to preserve Christian Europe, and calls the new Knights Templar a 'Christian military Order', as was its 12th-century predecessor. Although, clearly, he did not plan to join his mediæval brothers in their vows of celibacy, as he writes of planning a final "knees-up", shortly before the massacre, with a couple of call-girls and some vintage red wine he'd been saving for the occasion…

Setting the scene for what he asserts is an international alliance, he says: "The Knights Templar was re-founded in London in April 2002 by representatives from eight European countries, for the purpose of serving the interests of the free indigenous peoples of Europe and to fight against the ongoing European Jihad."

He claims between 15 and 80 'ordinated knights' [*sic*] are now members, but that it was first set up by nine men, including French, Dutch, Serbian, Russian and two Englishmen. The movement's full name is Pauperes Commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici (PCCTS), which is Latin for Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon – the proper title of the original Knights Templar.

According to his manifesto, the group used code names; Breivik's was 'Sigurd', probably after Sigurd Jorsalfare, a crusading king of Norway. His mentor was an Englishman codenamed 'Richard' (probably referencing Richard the Lionheart), who Breivik says introduced him to the ideas of the 'perfect knight' and new European knighthood. Breivik calls himself a one-man cell of the PCCTS, claiming many more exist and are plotting future atrocities. Until recently, there was a website (www.pccts.com), whose members discussed Christian mythology and appeared to suggest potential targets for attacks across Europe; of course, it may have been created by hoaxers and have been unrelated to Breivik's PCCTS, but the site has now been removed from the Internet.

A NEW SECRET SOCIETY?

Could a new sinister secret society be at work, or are Breivik's claims simply the ravings of a mentally ill mass murderer?

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / JONATHAN NACKSTRAND

Breivik's lawyer Geir Lippestad has called his client 'insane'. But Norwegian Police Security Service chief, Janne Kristiansen rebuts this saying: "I believe he is a sane person because he has been so focused over such a long time." She labels him a "calculating and evil limelight seeker". Breivik's mental state is being examined by court-appointed psychiatrists.

Dr Lars Davidsson, a clinical psychiatrist at the Angloeuropean Clinic in London, says, "It's most likely he is delusional. However, it is more usual for a psychotically deluded person to claim things that most people would consider outside the bounds of possibility, such as direct instructions from God or to think the CIA is trailing them. So his claims are not bizarre in that sense – this organisation could exist, even if it is unlikely. My diagnosis would be that he is a narcissistic psychopath. On his trip to England, more likely he was sitting in a pub, on his own, complaining to anyone who'd listen about foreigners. And he could have built this up, in his mind, into something more important. Or perhaps he did attend an EDL [English Defence League] meeting, and turned this meeting, in his head, into the reforming of the Knights Templar!"

According to psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg, narcissistic psychopaths can "idealise aggression" and tend to "self-aggrandise"; they can often identify with "powerful, idealised figures as part of a cohesive gang". Which sounds like a fairly apt description of Breivik and his obsession with a new Knights Templar.

But is there any evidence that Breivik's claims are true?

Matthew Feldman, director of the Radicalism and New Media Research Group at Northampton University, says although it's likely that Breivik is simply delusional, government counter-terrorist units are taking the threat very seriously: "Just because they're small and under the radar doesn't mean they don't exist." Feldman

TOP: Police search for bodies on Utoeya Island.

FACING PAGE: Breivik leaves the Oslo courthouse in a police car in on 25 July 2011.

RIGHT: One of the killer's 'self-portraits'.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / SCANPIX NORWAY

DIARY OF A MAD MAN

The Knights Templar Log is Breivik's diary of his preparations for the Olso attack. He posted it online along with his manifesto on the day of the attacks.

OCTOBER: Upon receipt of a license to own a rifle, he spends 1,400 euros buying a Ruger Mini-14 assault weapon, thought to have been used in the attacks.

DECEMBER: He talks about the three bottles of Chateau Kirwan 1979 red wine he has saved for a final "knees-up" before the slaughter. "My thought was to save the last flask for my last martyrdom celebration and enjoy it with two high-class prostitutes I intend to rent prior to the mission."

DECEMBER– FEBRUARY: To remain focused, he listens to trance music and plays *World of Warcraft 3*.

MARCH: Sells his Breitling watch and Montblanc fountain pen to raise funds.

APRIL: Orders fertiliser for the bomb. Enjoys a night on the town with friends in Oslo before setting up his bomb factory in a remote rented farm house.

MAY: Begins making his bombs with fertiliser. He writes: "It's the Eurovision finale today. I just love the Eurovision!" But Norway's entry is a "crap, politically correct contribution... an asylum seeker from Kenya performing a bongo song."

JUNE: Successfully tests his bomb. "I lit the fuse, went out of range and waited. It was probably the longest ten seconds I have ever endured... BOOM! The detonation was successful!"

25 JUNE: Complains about attracting female attention: "Refined individuals like myself are a rare commodity here so I notice I do get a lot of attention. It's the way I dress... mostly very expensive brand clothing, Lacoste sweaters... people can see from a mile away that I'm not from around here."

2 JULY: Works out details for plan A (bombing Oslo) and Plan B (the island massacre).

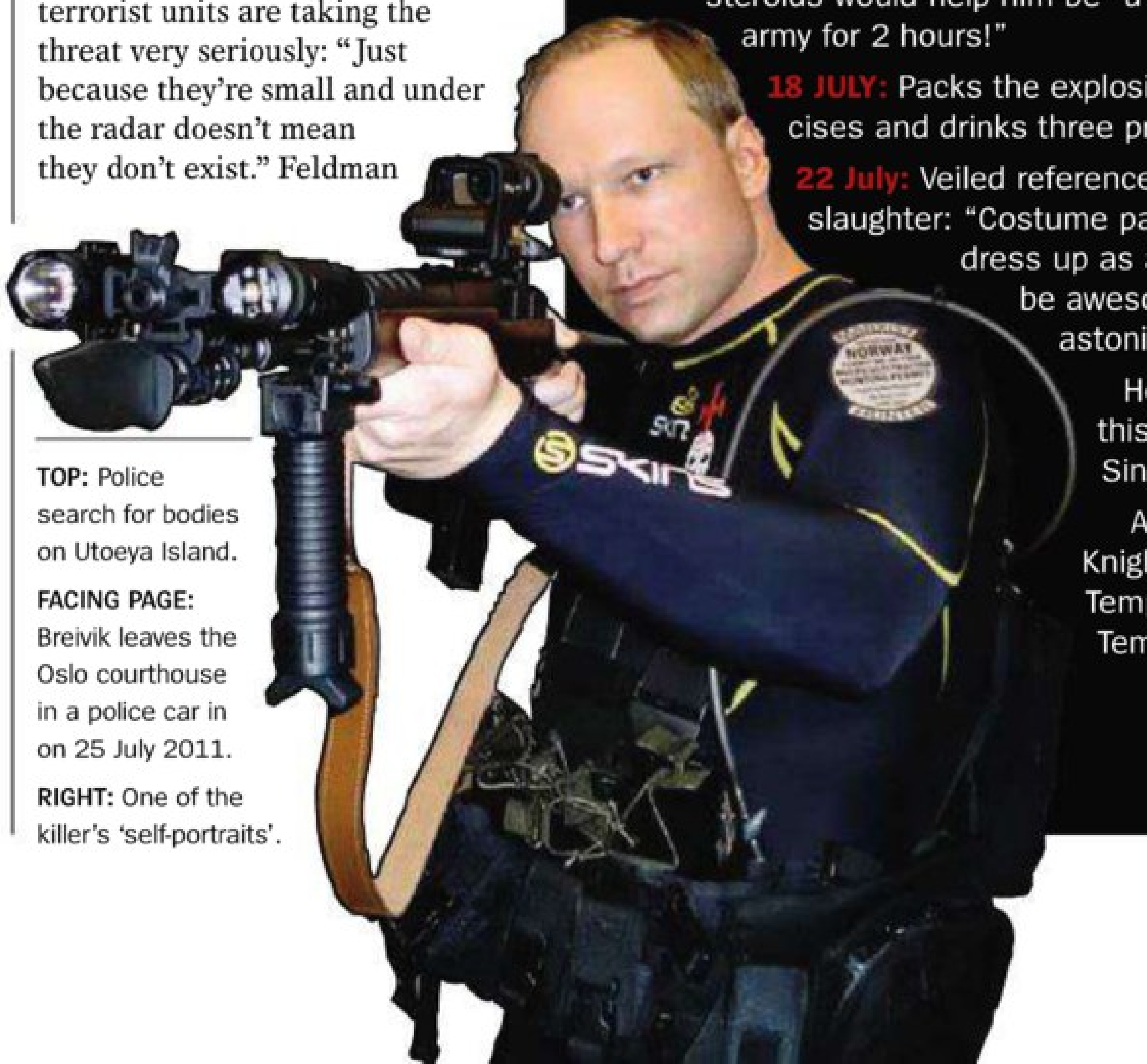
3 JULY: Has a day off, downloads some trance music and notices his "increased aggressiveness". Wonders if taking steroids would help him be "a superhuman one-man-army for 2 hours!"

18 JULY: Packs the explosives into his van, exercises and drinks three protein shakes.

22 July: Veiled reference to his planned island slaughter: "Costume party this autumn, will dress up as a police officer... will be awesome as people will be astonished."

He signs off: "I believe this will be my last entry. Sincere regards,

Andrew Berwick, Justiciar Knight Commander, Knights Templar Europe, Knights Templar Norway."



GETTY IMAGES / JEFF J MITCHELL

ABOVE: Members of the public pay their respects to Breivik's victims near Utoeya island. **BELOW:** Breivik in one of his pseudo-military 'Templar' uniforms.

believes that, while it is unknown whether the London gathering took place, Breivik's claims about other terrorist cells must be investigated. "Security services in the UK and Europe are looking at whether there are other chapters of this so-called Knights Templar group, as a matter of urgency," says Feldman.

So why has an extinct 12th-century Christian Order been appropriated by at least one 21st-century terrorist?

Dr Davidsson suggests: "Breivik feels the need to prove his superiority, so he's fixated on and identified himself as a Knight Templar. In his mind, he has made himself special because he is a member of a secret society consisting of only an elite few. Having insights, knowledge and being one of the pioneers in fighting a racial war is part of his narcissistic personality. The uniforms he poses in are another telling sign of his need to be elevated within society."

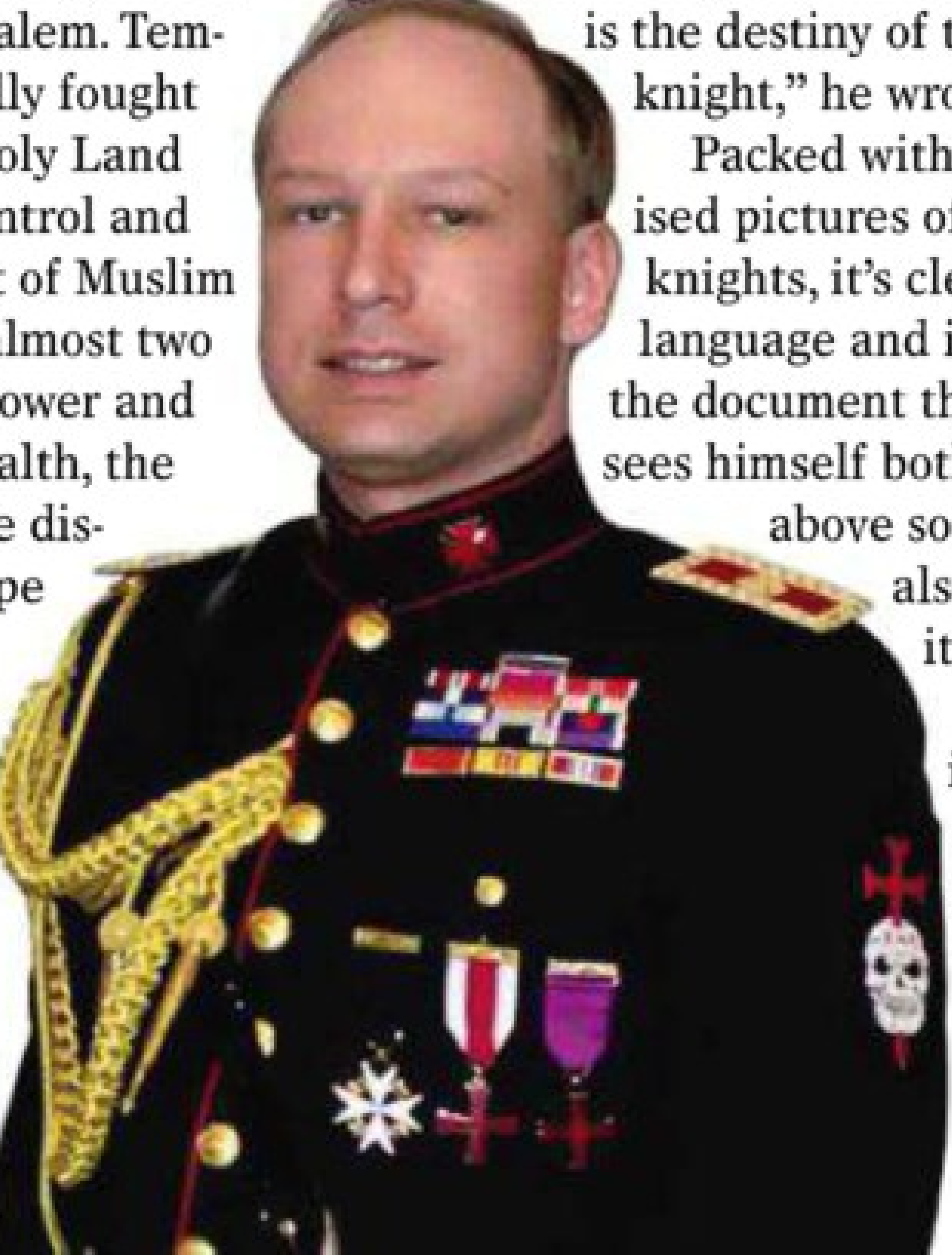
Six hours before the attacks, Breivik uploaded a slideshow of himself wearing a variety of bizarre costumes with fake military insignia, including a Knights Templar 'uniform', festooned with ribbon and medals.

Feldman adds: "It's all about mythologising himself."

The Hungarian commander John Hunyadi defeated Islamic ruler Sultan Mehmed II on 22 July 1456, so this could the reason for the date of Breivik's attack. In fact, the mass murderer eulogises Hunyadi as a perfect knight in his manifesto – along with Vlad the Impaler.

Officially in existence from 1119–1314, although romantic stories of its survival abound (see **FT188:56–57; 190:75–77; 192:74; 193:28–30, 38–41; 195:70–71**), the Templar order was formed to protect Christian pilgrims *en route* to Jerusalem. Templars eventually fought to keep the Holy Land in Western control and Jerusalem out of Muslim hands. After almost two centuries of power and increasing wealth, the Templars were disbanded by Pope Clement V, under intense pressure from the French king. The front page of Breivik's manifesto is emblazoned with a blood-red Templar cross, and advocates martyrdom – just as the original Templar knights would die rather than retreat from the battlefield. "A Knight Templar does not fear death he embraces it; he is sure of glory in heaven. Such is the destiny of the perfect knight," he wrote.

> **"Breivik feels the need to prove his own superiority"**



Packed with romanticised pictures of Crusader knights, it's clear from the language and imagery of the document that Breivik sees himself both as set above society but also as one of its saviours. Belonging to an organisation like the new Knights Templar gives him a sense of power:

"As a Knight you are operating as a jury, judge and executioner on behalf of all free Europeans. There are situations in which cruelty is necessary, and refusing to apply necessary cruelty is a betrayal of the people whom you wish to protect," he says in his manifesto.

THE FREEMASONARY LINK

Rumours are circulating on the Internet about Breivik's links with Freemasonary, with more outré sites even suggesting he is a mind-controlled automaton in a Freemason plot.

Well, Breivik was apparently a third-degree member of a Masonic Lodge in Oslo; although immediately after the attacks, the Grand Master of the Norwegian Order of Freemasons excommunicated him from the brotherhood, while his Lodge claimed only minimal contact with him during his four years of membership.

In modern Freemasonary, the Knights Templar is a Christian offshoot of the organisation, supposedly with no historical ties to the eponymous mediæval military Order. But its existence within Masonic tradition at least provides a suggestion as to where Breivik might have obtained his Templar idea.

Multiple admiring references in Breivik's manifesto to the English Defence League, an extreme right-wing protest group, raises specific concerns about possible UK involvement. "I wonder sometimes if one of the EDL founders was one of the co-founders of PCCTS, I guess I'll never know for sure," Breivik wrote.

In a statement on its website, the EDL denied any connection.

A former key EDL member was investigated by police about possible connections with Breivik. The man, who blogs using the name 'Lionheart', admitted he had been in contact with the Norwegian killer, but condemned his actions.

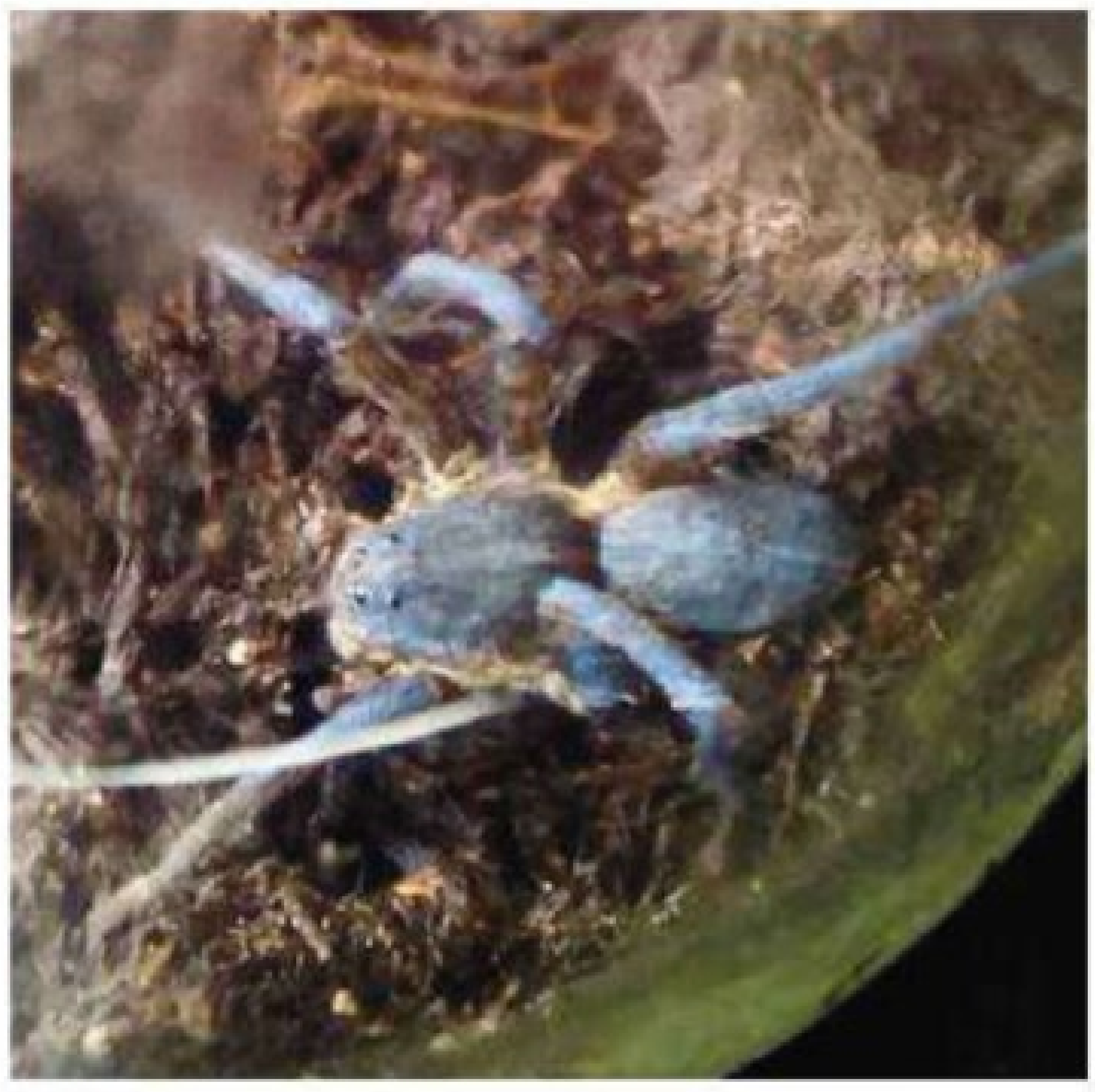
In his usual pseudo-serious tone, Breivik made plenty of risible suggestions, such as instructing would-be terrorist followers to "pretend they were gay to avoid suspicion" and asserting that he would visit a solarium before he began the slaughter "to look fresher".

He did say women could be martyrs for the cause, but mostly advised them to stay at home washing the dishes. One section of his YouTube slideshow bears an ardent recruitment message, beseeching prospective 'Justiciar Knights' to join his cause. But its seriousness is somewhat undermined by the accompanying image of a generously bosomed lady clutching a machine gun to her assets – her head cropped out of the shot, naturally. Such morbidly humorous gaffes would seem to suggest a disturbed personality attempting – at least in his own mind, though failing dismally – to present himself as reasonable and reasoned.

Apart from the horror of his actions, what makes the Breivik case so compelling, especially for forteans, is that his claims of a new secret society are just within the realms of possibility. Most likely, the world has witnessed a lone narcissistic psychopath at work, but there's still the whiff of a chance that the Knights Templar have been reawakened to wreak havoc on a heretical modern world.

AZ ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden



LEFT: The cobalt blue spider seen in Kansas.

BELOW: The globster washed ashore in Barbados.

BRIAN & STACIA WEILART

BLUE SPIDER ALERT IN KANSAS

In previous Alien Zoos, I have documented a number of anomalous blue spiders reported from various regions of England recently (including a seven-legged specimen from Yorkshire), which do not belong to any known species of blue spider, and whose unexpected coloration has not been satisfactorily explained so far (but see below). Now, a comparable report has been sent to me from the USA. In July 2011, after reading my earlier blue spider accounts, Brian Weilert and his wife Stacia, a teacher, each sent me an email concerning a cobalt-blue spider with seven legs (a moulting injury?) that Stacia had captured a fortnight earlier in their garden in southeastern Kansas. Since doing so, they have maintained it in a small, specially created habitat and have been feeding it on live insects. It has subsequently developed an eggsac, and produced a burrow.

I urged them to bring it to the attention of researchers at any local museum, scientific institution, nature centre, or zoo, especially (in view of its eggsac) as it may well soon be bringing into the world an entire brood of spiderlings – which may or may not themselves be blue, depending upon the origin of their mother's blue coloration. The Weilerts also sent me a couple of photographs, the clearer one of which appears here. It seems to be a lycosid wolf spider, of the genus *Hogna* – which is not known for natural blue species. *Bill and Stacia Weilert, pers. comms, 20+21+22 July; Loren Coleman and Randi Wood, pers. comms., 11 July; Dr George Beccaloni, 12 July 2011.*

IRIDOVIRUS INFECTION – BLUE WOODLICE, FLIES... AND SPIDERS?

Until recently, the only logical non-hoax explanation for non-natural blue spiders seemed to be contact with some external source of blue pigment, such as paint or ink. Earlier this year, however, Norwegian correspondent Terje Jonassen alerted me to a remarkable but hitherto little-publicised discovery. In recent times mostly, there have been over 100 fully-confirmed, non-hoax cases of non-natural blue invertebrates, in particular woodlice, as well as dipterans (true flies) with aquatic larvæ, which, when examined, were found to have been infected by a certain type of soil-inhabiting virus known as an invertebrate iridovirus (IIV), present in such high concentrations within the infected creature's tissues that it forms crystalline aggregations. These emit a bright blue iridescence and thereby bestow this coloration upon the creature. IIV infection can be caused by feeding upon infected animals and also by parasitic nematode worms. So it seems conceivable that the answer to the mystery of the blue spiders (or at least to some of them) may not involve encounters with external pigments or dyes but rather to internal IIV infection, most likely due to the spiders having consumed infected prey. This is why I have recommended to the Weilerts that they show their captive blue spider to local scientists, as it may provide an opportunity to investigate this exciting possibility directly. *Terje Jonassen, pers. comm, 4 Jan 2011; Norwegian Journal of Entomology, 14 Dec 2010.*

A NEW CARIBBEAN GLOBSTER

At around 11am on 31 May 2011, just as he was about to go for a swim in the sea, local fisherman Howard Kirton discovered a huge, white, hairy, amorphous carcase washed ashore on Silver Sands Beach in Christ Church, Barbados. By the following day, this putative 'sea monster' had attracted a large crowd of interested onlookers. Its description, along with a front page, full-colour photograph in Barbados's *Midweek Nation* newspaper for 1 June, showed it was undoubtedly a classic example of a globster – a tough skin-sac of decomposed sperm whale blubber (after the heavy skeleton has dropped away at sea), containing collagen, whose exposed fibres yielded the white 'fur'.

Eventually, some officials from the island's Coastal Zone Management Unit were dispatched to investigate, but by the time they arrived it had been washed back out to sea. Fortunately, only a week later, after having been seen floating at sea just offshore, it was rebeached at Atlantic Shores, again in Christ Church, where it was re-photographed, now covered in seaweed that had wrapped around it. It is not uncommon for globsters to be beached, washed out to sea, and then rebeached some time later in the same region – as happened with South Africa's Trunko globster in 1924 [**FT279:72**]. *Midweek Nation, 1+15 June 2011.*

CANINE HEROES

Grief, warnings and rescue operations from 'Man's best friend'

Army dog-handler Liam Tasker was on patrol north of Nahr-e-Saraj in Helmand province, Afghanistan, on 1 March with his sniffer dog Theo when he was shot dead by the Taliban. He was the 358th member of the British armed forces to die in Afghanistan since 2001. Theo was visibly "distressed" and had to be cut free from his lead as Lance Corporal Tasker's comrades attempted to save him. A few hours later, back at Camp Bastion, the British base, the dog suffered a fatal heart attack. The pair had spent 15 weeks on a handlers' course and in just five months uncovered 14 homemade bombs and hoards of weapons – a record for a dog and his handler in the conflict. Tasker, 26, described his joy at the close bond he had developed with Theo, a 22-month-old springer spaniel cross. "I love my job and working together with Theo," he said in an interview on a Ministry of Defence website in February. "He has a great character and never tires. He can't wait to get out and do his job and will stop at nothing." Theo's task was to be the 'front man', sniffing out any hidden IEDs, weapons and bomb-making equipment.

Born in Kirkcaldy, Fife, Tasker joined the Royal Army Veterinary Corps after starting his career as a vehicle mechanic. A member of 1st Military Working Dog Regiment, he was attached to 1st Battalion Irish Guards in Afghanistan. He "undoubtedly saved many lives," according to his commanding officer. His family said: "He died a hero doing a job he was immensely passionate about." His body was repatriated to RAF Lynham in Wiltshire, together with the ashes of his faithful dog. They were buried together in Tayside.

A campaign has been launched to award Theo a Dickin Medal – the animal equivalent of the Victoria Cross. Introduced in 1943, in the next six years the medal was awarded to 32 pigeons, 18 dogs, three horses and a cat.

PA WIRE / MOD

GETTY IMAGES / MATT CARDY

ABOVE: Lance Corporal Liam Tasker training with his sniffer dog Theo.

LEFT: Military working dogs at the funeral of L/Cpl Tasker.

The medal has been given to a further nine dogs after being revived in 2000. Recipients include Gustav the pigeon, first to relay news of the D-Day landings in Normandy, flying 150 miles in five hours on 6 June 1944; Rob, a Collie who worked with the SAS and made over 20 parachute jumps in the North African campaign; and Simon the cat, who survived shrapnel wounds from a cannon during an attack on *HMS Amethyst* in the Yangtze River in 1949. Simon inspired shipmates to save the vessel and killed off a rat infestation. There was also Olga the horse, who helped her rider rescue survivors after a German V1 flying bomb demolished four houses in Tooting, south London, in 1947; and three dogs – Apollo, Salty and Roselle – given the medal for their role is responding to the 9/11 attacks. *Guardian, 3 Mar; D.Mail, 3+4 Mar; Sun, 14 July 2011.*

Theo had a heart attack hours after Liam's death

- A dog rescued a handicapped woman from her burning house in Wisconsin in 2006, but his devotion cost him his life when he returned to save the family cat. Jesse, a Labrador retriever and German shepherd mix, fetched his owner Jamie Hanson, 49, the prosthetic leg she had worn since a car accident in 2003, and a telephone – before dragging her to safety. He then ran back to get the crying cat, but both animals died in the blaze. *Queensland Times, 19 Oct 2006.*

- On 22 June 2011, Jenny Conarroe from Edmonton, Alberta, let out the family dog, a six-year-old husky called Luna, for a last run and was horrified when she returned covered in thick mud. "She was just filthy, we had to hose her down," said Conarroe, who admitted she felt it was too dark to check out the source of the mud that night. The following morning, she and her husband Ryan investigated the back yard. "[Luna] had dug a huge hole, probably three feet by four feet [90 by 120cm] and a puddle had formed overnight, and it was bubbling," said Connaroe. The couple decided the phenomenon was probably gas-related and called Atco Gas. Less than 10 minutes later, a gas engineer arrived and confirmed the leak. "She must have smelled it, and if she hadn't started digging we probably wouldn't even have noticed it, even standing right there," said Connaroe. Gas had been spewing up from a dislodged pipe, a dangerous situation for the couple and their six children (aged three to 16) had it gone unnoticed. "The kids are calling her a hero, and she is." *cnews.canoe.ca, 25 June 2011.*

- A dog that saved its owners' lives by raising the alarm after they fell 200ft (60m) down a cliff in Torquay, Devon, on 31 July was nicknamed "Lassie" by rescuers. Police Sgt Lorraine Roberts said: "The dog ran up and down, barking furiously, until passers-by realised what had happened. It was just like a scene from a *Lassie* film." The woman, 46, was able to walk, but the man, 53, needed treatment for head injuries. *D.Telegraph, 1 Aug 2011.*

- Petty Officer Jon Tumilson, 35, was one of 22 Navy SEALs killed when their helicopter was shot down in Afghanistan in August. As 1,500 mourners gathered for his funeral in Rockford, Iowa, his loyal Labrador retriever, Hawkeye, lay down in front of his coffin and waited for his master, a poignant moment photographed by Tumilson's cousin, Lisa Pembleton. *D.Mirror, 26 Aug 2011.*

GETTY IMAGES / LISA PEMBLETON

ABOVE: Labrador retriever Hawkeye lies down before his owner Navy SEAL Jon Tomlinson's coffin after Tomlinson's helicopter was shot down in Afghanistan.

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

THE OSAMA BIN LADEN DEATH CONSPIRACIES

The death of political figures frequently produces conspiracy theories. Of course, there are always plenty of paranoids who find intimations of conspiracy in inconsistencies of media reporting; but the death of a political celeb is also an opportunity for some to make political capital. And the death of a figure like Osama bin Laden (OBL hereafter), who intersected with the military and intelligence bureaucracies and geopolitical interests of a number of states, has presented opportunities for many commenters.

In the event, the handling of the death of OBL by the US state (see **FT276:8–9**) was a perfect demonstration of how to generate conspiracy theories:

1. Do not produce the body. Do not even produce pictures of the body. Do not produce pictures of the dialysis machine that must have been there to keep him alive. Do offer one ambiguous side view of a man watching TV and do claim to have done miraculously quick DNA tests, which identified the body as OBL's.

2. Keep changing the official story of the event. There was a big firefight; no, there wasn't. The mission did not intend to kill him; yes, it did. OBL resisted; no, he didn't.

3. Put out obvious derogatory disinformation. Bin Laden hid behind a woman, or he had pornography on his computer.

4. Put out obvious nonsense: one of the helicopters used in the raid crashed, but no one was hurt.[1]

In particular, the decision not to produce evidence of the body – apparently because we are too squeamish to view the effects of gunshots – did nothing to persuade those, including some fairly senior intelligence people in America and Pakistan, who believe that OBL died in 2002 and was being 'kept alive' by both sides in the 'war on terror' who found his existence as a bogeyman (America) or inspiring figurehead (Al Qaeda) useful; nor did it persuade those others who think OBL's 'death' in the raid is a cover story for his being captured alive.

These initial conspiracy theories produced a second set when it was announced in an AP report on 6 August that "[M]ore than 20 Navy SEALs from the unit that killed Osama bin Laden were among the 31 US soldiers lost in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan." This was used by those who didn't believe the original version, such as Finian Cunningham, whose "Dead Men Don't Talk: US Navy Seals Destroyed to Cover Up Washington's Bin Laden Execution Hoax?" conveyed the whole conspiracy theory in a headline.[2]

One final delicious stirring of the pot was done by Dr RJ Hillhouse,[3] who reported that her intelligence sources told her that the story of finding OBL by tracking his courier was nonsense: a Pakistani intelligence officer gave up OBL to collect the $25 million reward offered by Uncle Sam. This informant "claimed that the Saudis were paying off the Pakistani military and intelligence (ISI) to essentially shelter and keep bin Laden under house arrest in Abbottabad... The CIA and friends then set about proving that OBL was indeed there. And they did."

At the end of all of which it is entirely unclear if the man killed was OBL,[4] how he died, or what happened on the raid. And maybe that was the intention all along. The one conspiracy theory nobody seems to have considered is that the muddle is deliberate.

NOTES

[1] The changing official stories are analysed in Russ Baker: "Who – and What – Are Behind the 'Official History' of the Bin Laden Raid?' http://bit.ly/nkS7kx (whowhatwhy.com).

[2] http://bit.ly/oklJco (globalresearch.ca).

[3] On her blog at www.thespywhobilledme.com/.

[4] The BBC ran an interview by Orla Guerin with local Abbottabad residents who said they knew the man in the big compound and he wasn't OBL. http://bit.ly/lJHyt7 (youtube).

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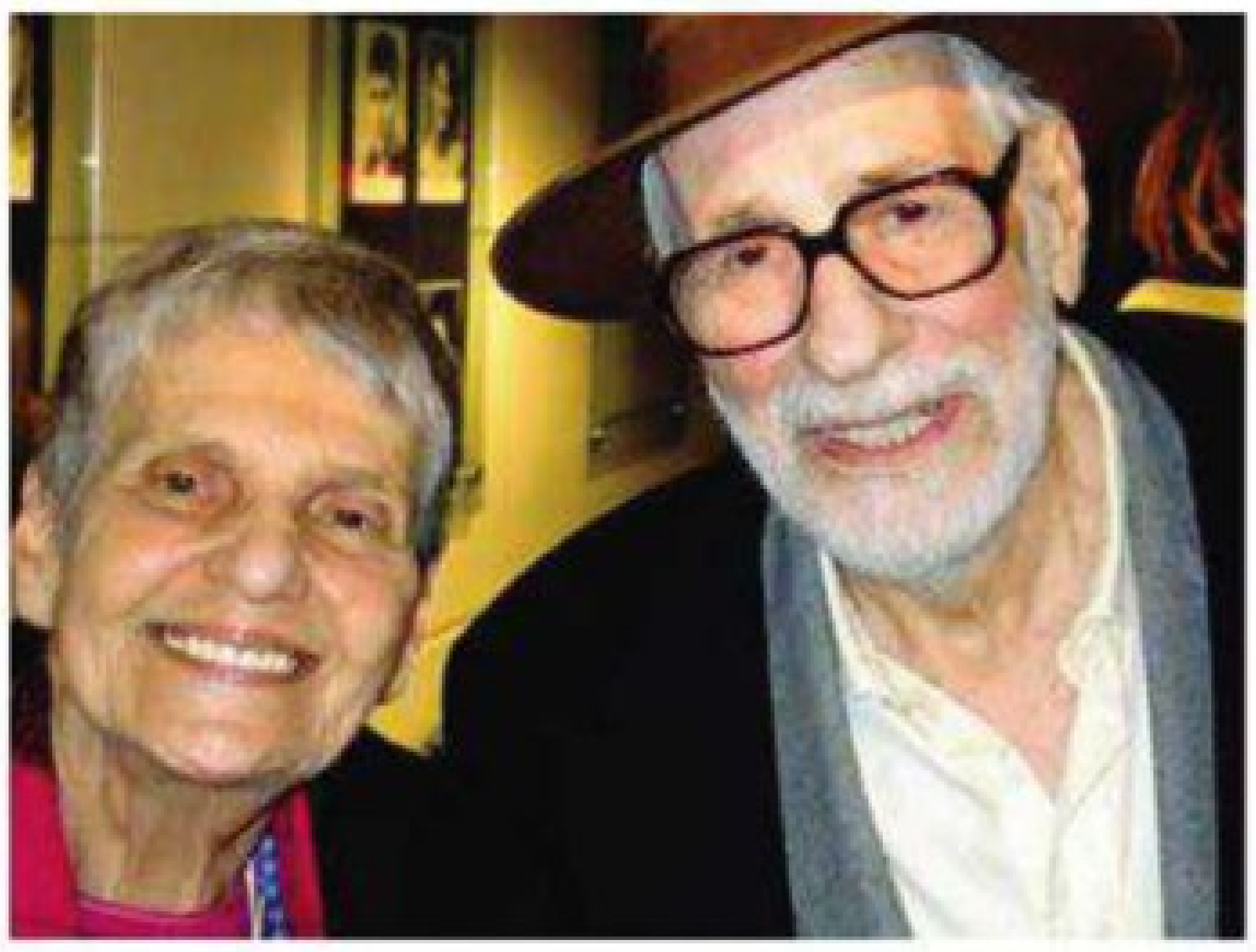
NECROLOG

We celebrate the lives of three veterans of the 'counter culture', plus a man who was bitten by snakes so many times that his blood was used as an anti-venin.



JOHN PAUL O'NEILL / FARRAGO POETRY

JAY AND FRAN LANDESMAN

Shortly after moving to London in the 1960s, Jay Landesman stood before his friend, the comedian Peter Cook, and delivered a deadly comedy routine that elicited profound silence. "Peter, this is subliminal humour," said Jay. "I'm trying to take the laughter out of comedy!" Cook replied: "Congratulations, Jay."

A flaneur and key literary figure of the Beat era, Irving Landesman was born in St Louis and changed his first name to Jay after reading *The Great Gatsby* in his teens. His father was a Jewish immigrant from Berlin who settled in St Louis after being hired to paint murals for the 1904 World's Fair. In 1948, Jay founded a quarterly journal called *Neurotica*, and the following year took it to New York, where he edited eight issues, with contributions from Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Marshall McLuhan. Jay was an effective midwife to fame – Norman Mailer later described him as "the man who started it all" – but throughout his life he was frustrated by his failure to become a celebrity. "Among his high-profile friends in the arts and entertainment," as his obituary in the *New York Times* put it, "he achieved the rare distinction of being famous for not being famous."

In 1950, Jay married the poet and lyricist Frances (Fran) Deitsch and, relinquishing control of *Neurotica* (which ceased publication in 1952 after censors objected to an article on castration), returned to St Louis, where he opened a cabaret room called The Crystal Palace. Among the little-known performers he booked were Woody Allen, Lenny Bruce, Dick Gregory and an 18-year-old called Barbra Streisand. For the rest of the Fifties, the Landesmans were known for their open-house sex and drugs shindigs in Greenwich Village, to a background of bebop and other jazz. In 1959, he turned his unpublished novel *The Nervous Set* into a musical, with lyrics by Fran and music by Tommy Wolf – but it bombed on Broadway and closed after 23 performances. However, Fran's songs from the show, *Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most* and *Ballad of the Sad Young Men*, became jazz standards, recorded by the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Shirley Bassey.

In 1964, the Landesmans moved to London with their sons, Cosmo and Miles, knowing no one apart from Peter Cook, and plunged headlong into the Swinging Sixties. The Landesmans settled in Islington where they became noted for their highly publicised "open marriage" and gave legendary parties for such friends as Tom Driberg and Fenella Fielding. Jay was a lecherous old roué with a devoted following of intelligent and attractive women. In 1970, he became sales manager for Harmony Foods, set up by Craig and Gregory Sams. "Without Jay's determination," said Craig Sams, "Harmony Foods might not have made it and the organic brands it generated – Whole Earth, the original VegeBurger and Green & Black's – would never have seen the light of day."

In 1977, Jay launched Polytantric Press with a reprint of Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945); his other publications included *Hancock's Last Half Hour* by Heathcote Williams and *The Punk* by Gideon Sams. Around this time, he bought 50 scrapbooks of press clippings made by George Ives, a friend of Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter, which he found dumped on the pavement outside a junk shop in Camden Passage, and employed Paul Sieveking (*FT*'s founding co-editor) to make a selection, which he published as *Man Bites Man, the Scrapbook of an Edwardian Eccentric* (1980). This included a wide range of forteana.

Jay also indulged in a series of mostly unsuccessful ventures, including putting on a musical about Dracula; staging a psychedelic drag show called Drag-It-On-Home-Baby; writing an unpublished surrealist novel called *Bad Nipple*; and managing the career of Doshin, Britain's worst kung-fu stripper. Jay was a habitué of Soho watering holes, an archetypal lounge lizard keeping pace with the likes of Jeffrey Bernard. Fran continued her career as a lyricist and later as a singer. "As a performer she moves like the Bride of Frankenstein; as a singer she sounds like Shirley Temple being strangled," as her son Cosmo Landesman observed a little unkindly in his memoir *Starstruck* (2008). Fran composed a mock epitaph for herself: "It was a good life, but it wasn't commercial."

Irving Ned (Jay) Landesman, writer and publisher, born St Louis, Missouri 15 July 1919; died London 20 Feb 2011, aged 91. Frances (Fran) Deitsch, afterwards Landesman, jazz lyricist and performer, born New York City 21 Oct 1927; died London 23 July 2011, aged 83.

BILL HAAST

Between 1947 and 1984, this self-proclaimed American "snakeman" ran the Miami Serpentarium, where 50,000 people a year paid to watch him snatch snakes behind the reptiles' heads and jam their teeth into soft plastic to milk their venom, draining it into test tubes for use in snakebite serum, something he did 100 or so times a day. A gram of venom

fetched $5,000, but Haast (above) suffered for his business, injecting himself daily with a cocktail of venoms from 32 species for more than 60 years in order to develop an immunity to bites. One of his hands looked like a claw, a reminder of an encounter with an eastern diamondback rattlesnake. An index finger was mangled by a Malayan pit viper, and when a cottonmouth sank its fangs into another digit, turning it black, his wife had to snip the fingertip off with garden secateurs.

He closed the Miami Serpentarium in 1984 and moved to Utah for a few years but returned to Florida in 1990 and settled in a Punta Gorda ranch with his third wife Nancy and some 400 snakes that supplied his laboratory. It transpired that Haast's own blood, rich in antibodies, could play as vital a part in saving snakebite victims' lives as venom itself. Transfusions in which he was the donor are credited with saving the lives of at least 21 people around the world. Over the years, Haast reckoned he had handled more than three million snakes, and had been bitten by poisonous snakes at least 173 times, including some 20 occasions which had almost fatal results. "I could become a poster boy for the benefits of venom," he boasted in 2006. "If I live to be 100, I'll really make the point." And so he did.

Bill Haast, snakeman, born Paterson, New Jersey 30 Dec 1910; died Punta Gorda, Florida 14 June 2011, aged 100.

GETTY IMAGES

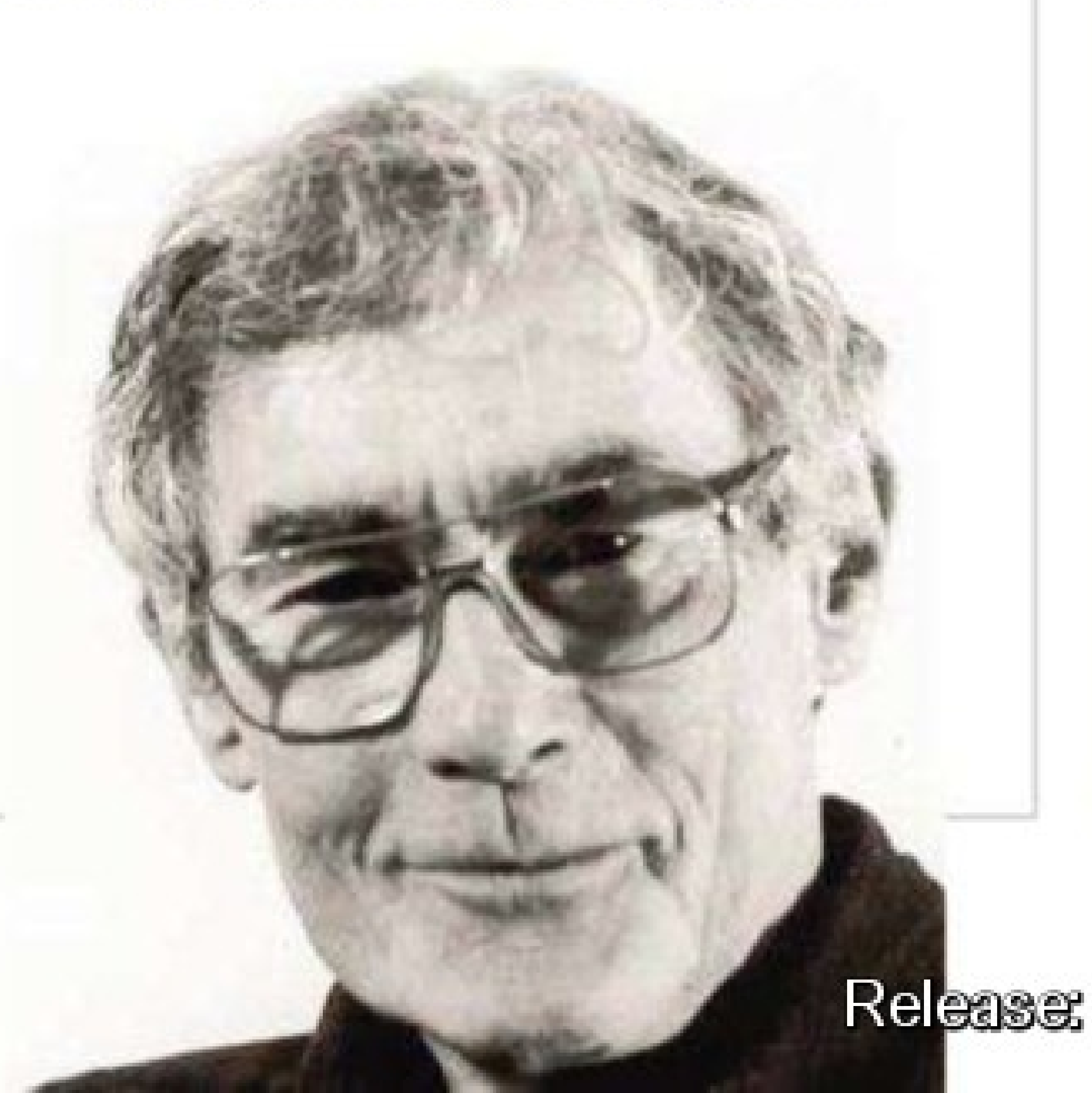
THEODORE ROSZAK

Roszak was an erudite academic who coined the term "counter culture" to define the youthful rebellions of the later 1960s and – in his most famous work, *The Making of a Counter Culture; Reflections on the Technocratic Society* (1969) – offered a rationale for the so-called Summer of Love in 1967 and the eruption of student dissent a year later. He argued that technology and the pursuit of science had alienated the young, who sought comfort and "meaning" in psychedelics, exotic religions and alternative ways of living. The son of an immigrant cabinet-maker, he obtained a doctorate in history at Princeton in 1958 and in the early 1960s moved to London, where he edited *Peace News* before returning to the US, where for 35 years he taught at what is now California State University, East Bay, retiring in 1998.

Roszak promoted "neo-Luddism", arguing against an over-reliance on computer technology; in education he attacked "an excess of information" that "may actually crowd out ideas, leaving young minds distracted by sterile, disconnected facts, lost among the shapeless heaps of data." He also became a leading figure in what he called ecopsychology, and wrote *The Voice of the Earth* (1992), a pioneering work on the relationship between planetary and personal health. In all, he wrote and edited about 20 books, notably *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (1972). A string of novels included *Flicker* (1991), acclaimed the best ever written about the film-going experience.

As the *New York Times* put it: "Dr. Roszak chronicled a generation's journey from hippies to hip replacement. But he never veered from the final, gentle suggestion in his *Wasteland* nearly four decades ago. 'There is nothing to do, nowhere to get,' he wrote. 'We need only stand still in the light.'"

Theodore Roszak, historian, social critic and novelist, born Chicago 15 Nov 1933; died Berkeley, California 5 July 2011, aged 77.



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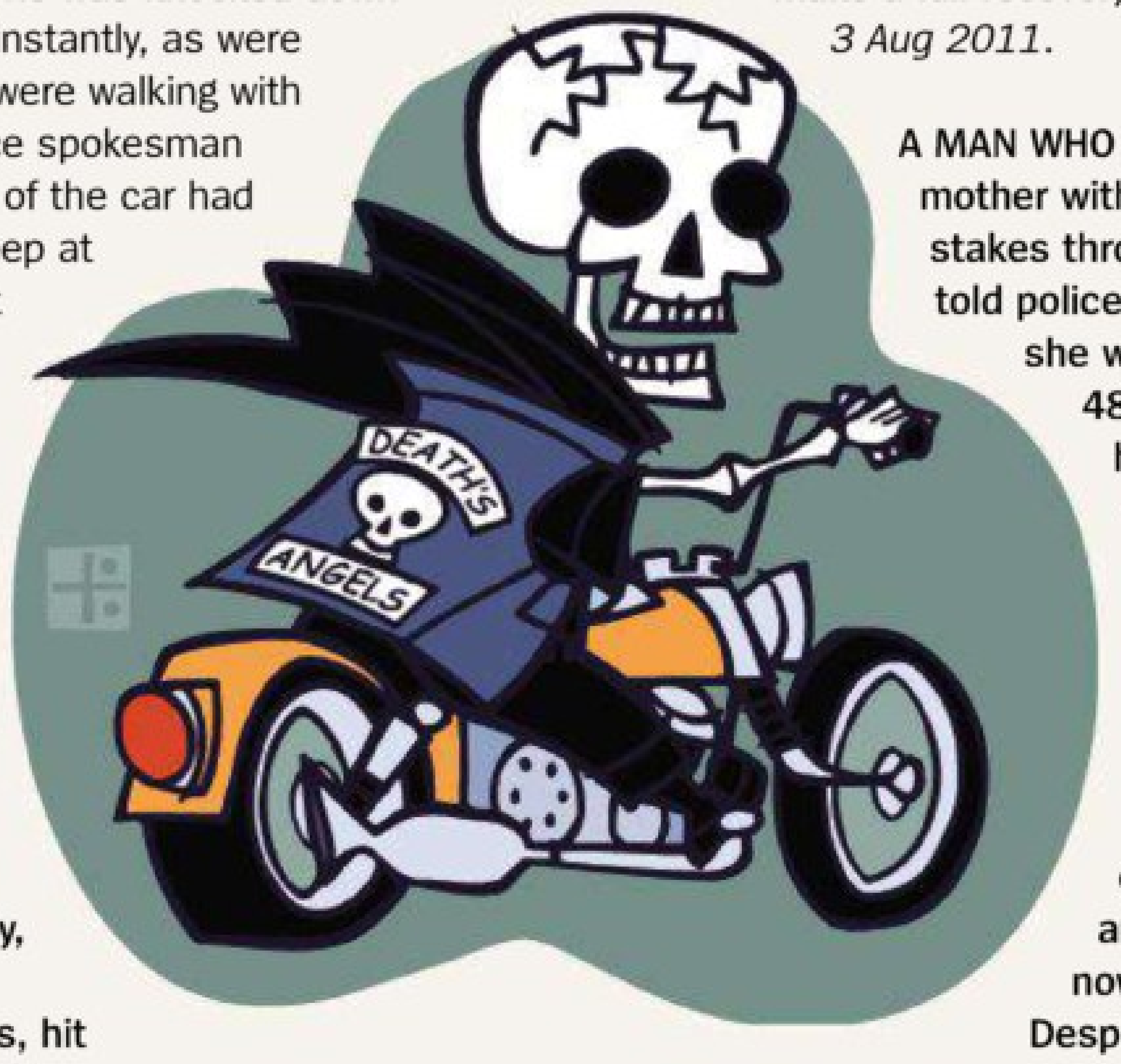

TERRY COLON

ON 27 AUGUST, A 40-YEAR-OLD LORRY DRIVER left his home in the town of Ordes in northwest Spain, planning to walk 20 miles (32km) to Caion so that he could give thanks at the shrine of the "Virgin of Miracles" for his recovery from a road accident a year earlier. A mile into his pilgrimage, he was knocked down by a car and killed instantly, as were his two aunts who were walking with him. An Ordes police spokesman said that the driver of the car had probably fallen asleep at the wheel, and that an investigation had been opened. *[AFP] 30 Aug 2011.*

PHILIP A Contos, 55, riding bareheaded on one of about 550 motorcycles in an anti-helmet law rally, lost control, went over the handlebars, hit his head on the pavement and died. The accident happened on 2 July in Onondaga, a town in central New York State, near Syracuse. Police said Mr Contos would probably have survived if he had been wearing a helmet. He was driving a 1983 Harley-Davidson on a helmet protest ride organised by American Bikers Aimed Towards Education, or ABATE. The organisation states that it encourages the voluntary use of helmets but opposes mandatory helmet laws. Mr Contos, of Parish, hit his brakes and his motorbike fishtailed. He was pronounced dead at a hospital. *[AP] 4 July 2011.*

A MAN WAS STRUCK BY LIGHTNING AS HE scattered his brother's ashes on an Italian mountain. Federico Dean, 41, stood on the picturesque Jof di Montasio peak favoured by his younger brother Matteo, 35, who had been killed in a motorbike accident in Mexico last June. As he scattered the ashes, a violent thunderstorm swept in and journalist Federico was killed instantly by the lightning bolt. It threw him from the mountain and he fell about 100m (330ft). Police and mountain rescue teams at the Julian Alps near Trieste on the border with Slovenia in north-west Italy were called to the scene, but there was nothing they could do and the body was taken to a local mortuary. His friend Gabriele Franco, 35, who was with him and who had raised the alarm, suffered severe burns, but was expected to make a full recovery. *dailymail.co.uk, 3 Aug 2011.*

A MAN WHO KILLED HIS mother with two wooden stakes through her heart told police he thought she was a witch. The 48-year-old also handcuffed her and filled her mouth with sealing foam. He said he had saved his 70-year-old mother from eternal damnation and that she would now go to Heaven. Despite also telling police there were aliens in the flat he shared with her in Blagoveshchensk, Russia, officials said he was not mentally ill – perhaps setting a new frontier for the definition of sanity. *Sun, 18 June 2011.*

A 27-YEAR-OLD MAN, NAMED ON A KITE website as Marcos, was killed on 24 July after being swept 50ft (15m) into the air by his power kite and plunging to the ground. He was with his family and friends when he was caught by a gust of wind and carried away. It is not clear if he let go of the kite, which had a 19ft (5.8m) wingspan, or was flung back to the ground as he held on at Dunstable Downs in Bedfordshire. He broke his arm, pelvis and both legs, and was pronounced dead at the scene from a suspected heart attack. *D.Mail, 26 July 2011.*

POLICE IN CALGARY, ALBERTA, WERE CALLED on 2 August and found a 29-year-old man dead from multiple stab wounds. James Karl Bach, 54, was arrested and faced a charge of manslaughter. Bizarrely, the victim's name was Brent Stabbed Last. *cnews.canoe.ca, 3 Aug 2011.*

the UFO files

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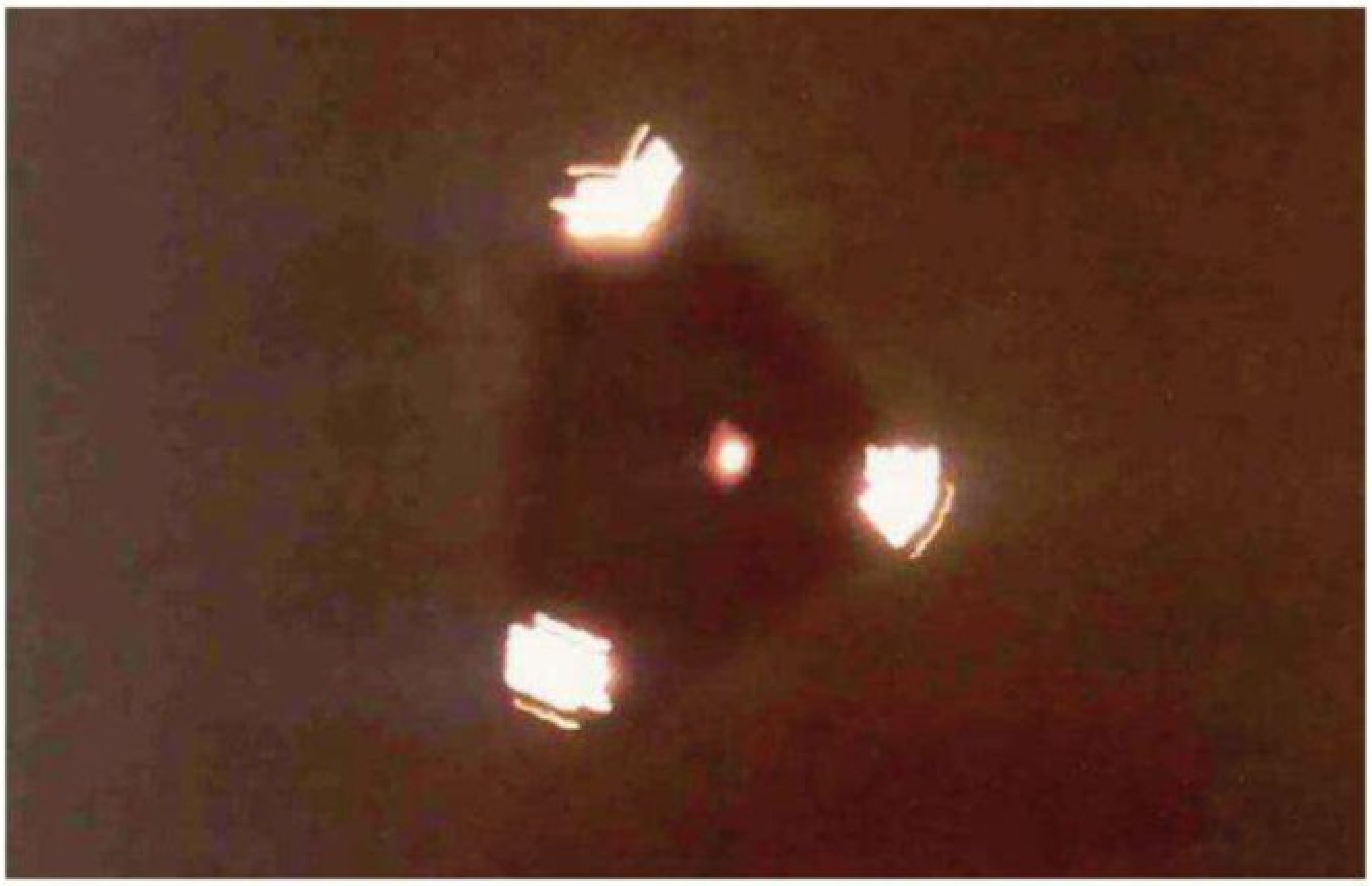
FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

KEAN TO UNCOVER THE TRUTH?

The book *UFOs: Generals, Pilots, and Government Officials Go on the Record* by ufology's newest rising star, Leslie Kean (reviewed in **FT280:62**) was a big hit last year and spawned a History Channel documentary that aired in August. Kean appears blind to the numerous evidential flaws in what she describes as the "overwhelming evidence" for alien visitations. But her policy of ignoring sceptical voices backfired when a photograph taken during a noted Belgian UFO flap, hailed by Kean as convincing evidence, was unmasked as a hoax. The Petit-Rechain photograph (a 35mm slide) surfaced during the 1990 UFO flap in Belgium and shows a triangular formation of lights similar to those reported by numerous credible witnesses, including police officers. The photographer was a 20-year-old man identified only as "Patrick". Sceptics pointed out several problems with the image, but the Belgian group SOBEPS concluded the photo was genuine. Most suspicious was the lack of any background that would allow the size of the "object" and its distance from the camera to be calculated. All that could be said was, yes, it *could* be a giant hovering craft. But, on the other hand, it could equally be a tiny model close to the camera. As an investigative journalist, Kean should have been suspicious about the provenance of this photo. Instead, she went on record to say: "[I]n the history of UFO studies the Petit-Rechain photo stands out as one of the most convincing pieces of evidence of a sighting to date." Unfortunately, one month before the programme aired, "Patrick" appeared on Belgian TV to 'fess up. "The UFO," he said, "is not a spaceship from a distant galaxy but a panel of painted Styrofoam with three spots affixed." We don't know Patrick's motivation for the hoax or the timely confession, but we do know this isn't the first time a hoaxer has hooked a big fish on his line (and it won't be the last). The lesson for all those wishing to stake their reputation on *any* UFO image remains *caveat emptor*. http://bit.ly/nX9SXr (badufos.blogspot.com).



CROP CRAP CONTINUES TO CONFUSE

The crop circle industry continues unabated and seemingly unabashed by conclusive evidence that the only intelligence involved in the creation of these formations is human. Although numbers of circles have reduced dramatically from the glory days of the 1980s and 1990s, they are still being produced. Crop Circle Connector reports 60 in the UK and 46 in the rest of the world as of 9 September. And, yes, there are still many people who believe that some form of supernatural agency is responsible for their sudden nocturnal arrival. A recent time-lapse YouTube video, posted by one of the teams of circle makers, should be the last straw for the 'believers', showing as it does the creation of a complex crop pattern in a matter of hours. But will this footage cause crop circle belief failure among the faithful? We doubt it very much. http://bit.ly/ph7Esu (YouTube); http://bit.ly/gJcvo9 (cropcircleconnector.com).

LOCH! IT'S A UFO

At 8pm on Saturday 20 August, several people saw an object streak low across the sky and crash at the southern end of Scotland's enigmatic Loch Ness. One witness said it was white, another blue. Yet another believed it was round and balloon-shaped. Others 'saw' a hang-glider or microlite fall to earth. Perceptual ambiguity aside, a full-scale search by the emergency services was launched, involving police, coastguard officers, a lifeboat crew and an RAF search and rescue helicopter. The search was abandoned after three hours, since nothing had been found. Neither media nor witnesses actually used the term UFO, yet in essence this sighting was no different from numerous media reports which *are* framed as UFOs. As such, this type of sighting should be of great interest, occupying as it does the liminal space between identifiable phenomenon and 'UFO'. We have no idea what the cause of the 'sighting' actually was, but the most likely culprit is a daylight meteor. These can be quite spectacular and often appear to 'crash', frequently generating searches and column inches. Whatever perceptual and social mechanisms turn some events into UFOs and others into crashed microlites, they are, we feel, at the heart of ufology and deserve much more study. http://bit.ly/oEqaQa (news.stv.tv).

RIP STUART MILLER

The north of England has a long tradition of producing dedicated ufologists and UFO magazine editors, not least Jenny Randles and the late Graham Birdsall. In 2006, Stuart Miller, a newcomer to the subject, began a regular email newsletter, *UFO Review*, which was not only a mine of useful information but didn't suffer fools gladly or take itself too seriously: in short the antithesis of most UFO publications. Miller had always wanted to edit a newsstand UFO magazine and in 2008 created the promising *Alien Worlds*, a magazine dealing with all aspects of ufology and related matters. Unfortunately, the magazine only ran for four issues. His pride somewhat dented, and stung by the financial consequences of his failed venture, Miller retired from ufology and nothing more was heard from him, despite many attempts at contact. In August, we heard the sad news that he had died in May this year in a motorcycle crash, which came as a shock to us all. RIP Stuart.

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES DISCUSSES THE LIVES OF TWO INFLUENTIAL UFOLOGISTS.

FLIGHTS OR FANCY?

JENNY RANDLES marks the passing of Hilary Evans and Budd Hopkins, and reflects on how they both influenced UFO research.

I met both of these men, and in different ways they changed my thinking.

Evans was very much a fortean, with an eclectic approach to weird phenomena. He sought links and patterns between many things. He was erudite and well travelled, yet looked to human consciousness for clues, while never assuming that all phenomena could be explained as 'flights of fancy'.

Hopkins was more traditional. He believed that there were genuine UFOs, aliens and abductions, and that he must find the source of these incursions and their purpose.

In fact, these two men were classic champions for the opposing schools of ufology. Hilary helped mould the so-called psychosocial approach prominent in European research; Budd became a focal point for those who believe in the ETH (extraterrestrial hypothesis) when few outside the UFO community were listening.

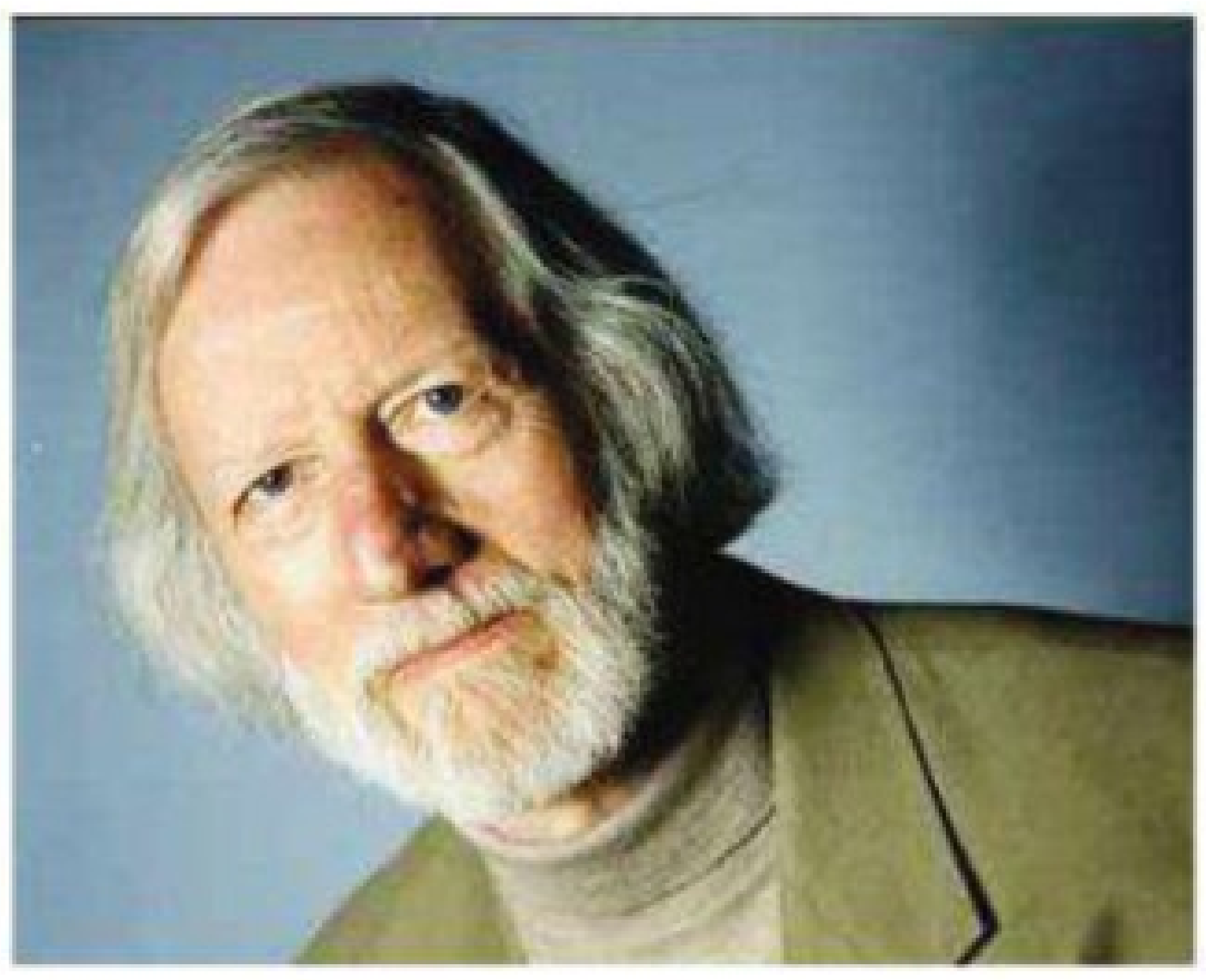
Of course, cultures influence mindsets, and it's no surprise that Evans was greatly respected in European circles and less known beyond them, while Hopkins took a while to be recognised outside the US but became globally known. It's a fact that alien invasions sell, whereas discussions involving visions sound like scepticism and are never going to capture the attention of millions.

Evans above!

Hilary Evans arrived on the scene in the late 1970s and his knowledge was invaluable when the first CE4 (Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind) cases taxed our investigators. In the UK, the term 'CE4' was devised to escape from the presumptions within the phrase 'alien abduction' (which inferred that the debate over origin had ended before it had begun). Hilary served as a consultant to these UK investigations and did some good field work as well.

CE4s were a minor flood by 1978, the year of the Spielberg movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. This was a clue that Hilary noted, and he urged us to unravel the cultural influences and psychological triggers that might cause a witness to see a grey alien conducting medical tests rather than a spiritual entity preaching anti-war sentiments.

In old-style thinking, only the grey alien warranted a UFO investigation; the spiritual entity was someone else's problem. Most people had spectacularly failed to recognise that this was circular logic, where definition of what qualified as 'evidence' determined what you then went out to find. Hilary Evans did not miss clues like this, and as a result of his erudition I started looking too.



In the world of ufology they were opposing champions

Hilary published a seminal work in 1984 with a title that explained what he was about – *Visions, Apparitions, Alien Visitors* – showing how such things are different expressions of one root phenomenon. Sadly, to many corners of ufology the title implied this was not a book out to prove that aliens had landed – ergo the writer was debunking. They simply missed the nuances he discovered.

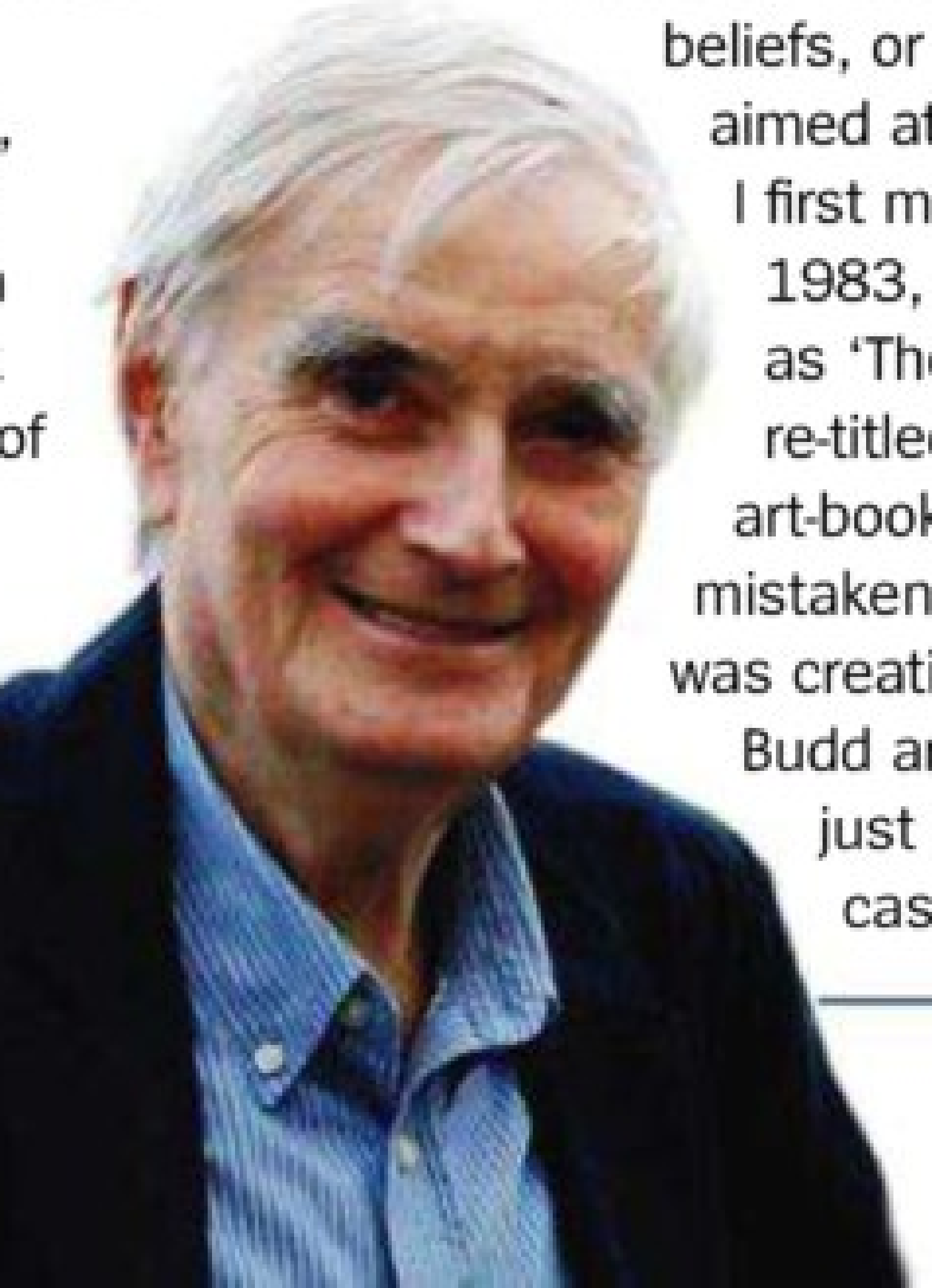
Evans also pioneered the idea of 'grafting', in which an amorphous event is moulded to fit a meaningful pattern. He wrote in one 1990 paper: "If a witness is to believe in his own story (and, of course, he must if it is to have the psychological effect – which is why he is having the experience at all) then others must believe it in it also." He made us see that you had to look behind the illusion formed by the 'facts' of the story to the reason why *that* story had happened to *this* witness; all without denying its power or – in some sense – its reality.

Budding orator

Budd Hopkins had a hard time with such thinking. He clashed with Hilary from time to time. But Budd knew how to wow the crowds and his oratory rapidly turned him into a star of the UFO lecture circuit.

Hopkins was brilliant at giving ufologists what they wanted (support for their beliefs, or rousing counter-thrust aimed at some brave sceptic).

I first met him in the US in 1983, when his book (written as 'The Invisible Epidemic' but re-titled *Missing Time* by his art-book publisher to avoid being mistaken for a medical textbook) was creating a buzz in the States. Budd argued that there were not just a handful of abduction cases, but potentially millions – lurking below the surface, repressed from memory by alien intervention. Working with a psychologist who performed regression hypnosis, he was uncovering numerous examples showing a chilling pattern.



LEFT: Hilary Evans. **BELOW:** Budd Hopkins.

I had the fortune of travelling the States in the company of Dr J Allen Hynek. Allen got me into a small room where a gaggle of renowned UFO researchers were listening awestruck to Hopkins offering a sort of 'sermon on the mount'. He told of an 'amazing' new case that would turn ufology on its head. A family was being abducted repeatedly and there were new discoveries about hybrid alien-human baby experiments. This research would emerge four years later as *Intruders* – a book and TV series that inspired a plot for *The X-Files* series.

It is curious how I reacted to Budd when I first met him. He seemed affable and yet messianic. I recognised immediately that many clues appearing in the UK cases I was exploring were also in his research.

I told him we found patterns that were similar, although in Britain people were seeing friendly, human-like entities with blond hair and blue eyes, while in America they were smaller, squat and grey. Budd assured me the differences were because the more shocking memory of 'real' aliens and terrible experiments was masked in the UK by 'screen memories' that calmed the witness. More intense regression would excavate the nightmare from their subconscious minds.

For a time, I was massively impressed with this idea and it swayed me towards thinking that Hopkins was right. However, I saw escalating problems – such as how previously uncommitted witnesses that I met were becoming afraid for their sanity or the safety of their children after hypnosis. And I worried over the ethics of freeing a memory (that might be a fantasy) in our zeal to prove that aliens were landing.

Yes, I could go away and write a book, but the witness might face lifelong trauma as a result of our unintentional mind-meddling.

Plus, of course, here in the UK Hilary Evans's research wasn't viewed as the work of the devil but as a genuine contribution to a balanced perspective. So, by the end of the 1980s we had banned the use of regression hypnosis in BUFORA cases.

Of course, that didn't stop the tide of regression elsewhere; neither did it end abduction cases, nor nullify belief in alien abductions. But it sent a message that some of us felt we should stop and think about what we were doing to real people in our pursuit of what was just a theory.

None of this would have happened had it not been for the very different contributions of these two men.

33

UP IN SMOKE IN BARNSTAPLE

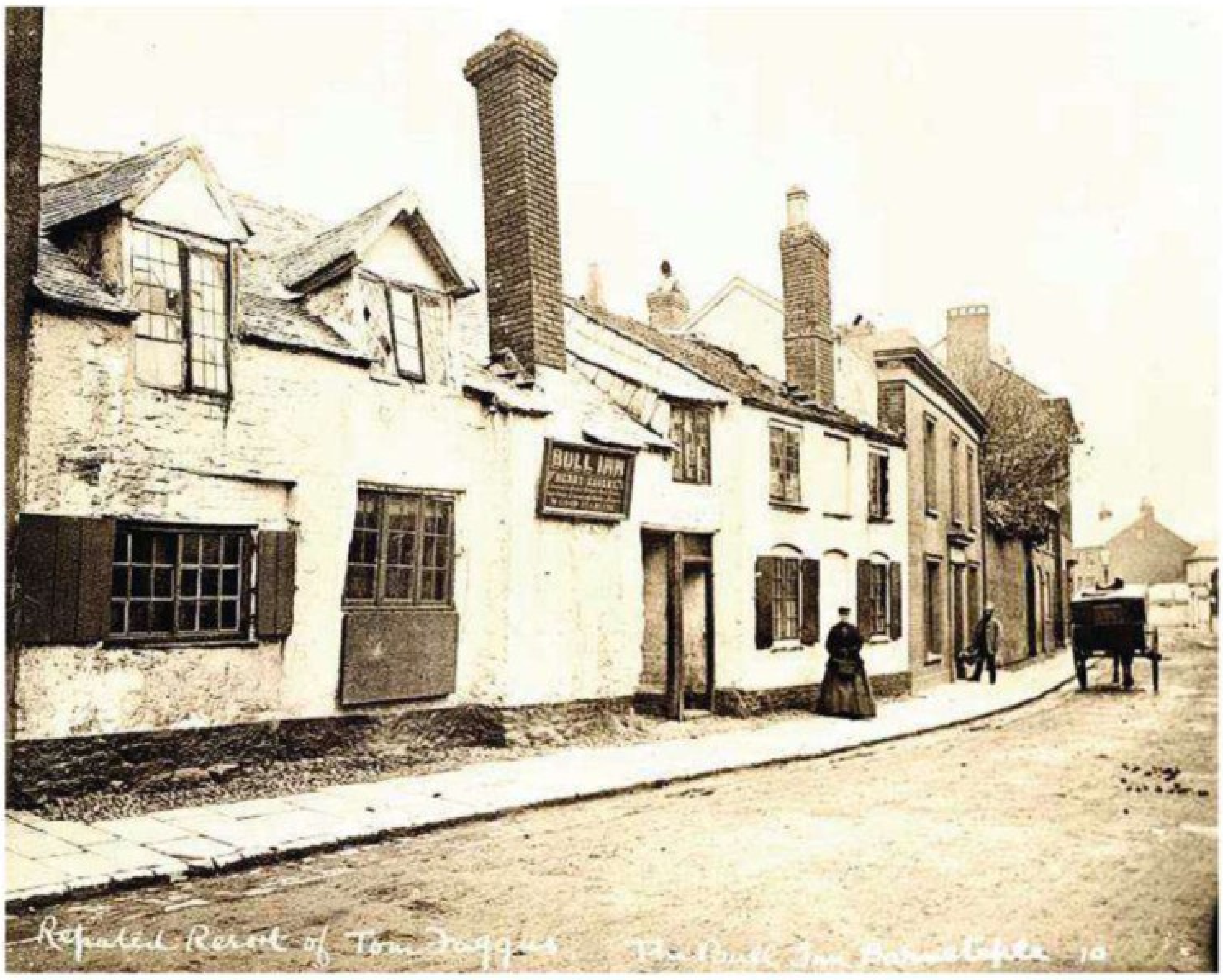
PETER CHRISTIE finds a case of Spontaneous Human Combustion from 19th-century Devon, reported locally but previously unrecorded in fortean literature.

Many years ago, I wrote an account of a famous 18th-century case of Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) from Ipswich, Suffolk (**FT35:6–10**) and since then have read a lot of material on this most fortean of phenomena. My main writing interests are now centred on the local history of north Devon and during my researches I was excited to come across a previously unrecorded case of what has every appearance of being a classic case of SHC.

In the *North Devon Herald* for 26 March 1885 occurs a headline guaranteed to grab any fortean's attention: "Appalling Death in Barnstaple – Shocking Incineration of a Woman". The story it refers to begins: "Quite a thrill of horror was experienced throughout Barnstaple yesterday morning, when the news became bruited abroad that a woman named Anne Hill, who is well-known by a large number of the inhabitants of the borough, had been found in her house, burnt to death, under circumstances of peculiar horror." In the 1881 Census, Anne appears living in a cottage in Bull Court, Barnstaple, where she is listed as a 61-year-old greengrocer sharing her house with her 25-year-old son.

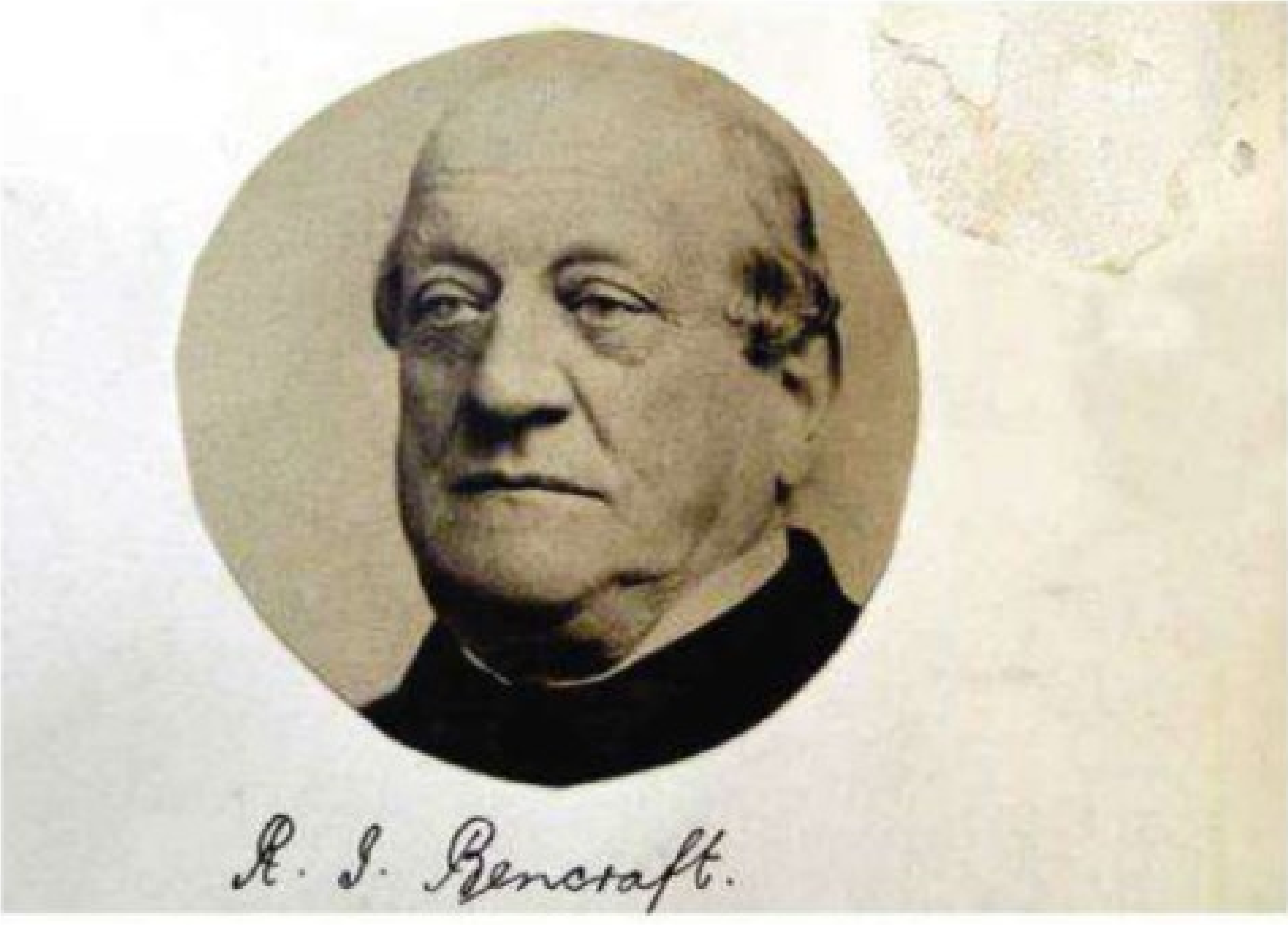
The *Herald* described her as a well-known "regrater" in Barnstaple Market, which meant she bought and sold vegetables and fruit brought into town by country people. On the day in question, she had been working at her usual position before packing up and going to the Nag's Head public house where, from the sound of it, she was a regular. She stayed until dusk and then went to her cottage "in her usual condition" – which can be taken in various ways! In 1885, she was living on her own and it wasn't until the next morning that anyone came to see her.

The visitor was her granddaughter, who went "as was her custom, with a cup of tea for her". As she pushed open Anne's door, she "was startled at finding the place so full of smoke that she could discern nothing through the darkened mist". Calling a neighbour to help, they managed to clear the smoke – upon which the granddaughter observed "something" between the sofa and the table. This was all that remained of Anne – of whom "nearly every part of the body, except the head and a foot, was literally burnt to ashes, even the bones being reduced to cinders, and the features were quite unrecognisable – blackened with heat and smoke". In something of an understatement, the reporter added: "The wonder is that the house was not burnt down as well".



TERRY HATTON

As Mary Hutchings pushed open her grandmother's door, she "was startled at finding the place so full of smoke that she could discern nothing through the darkened mist."

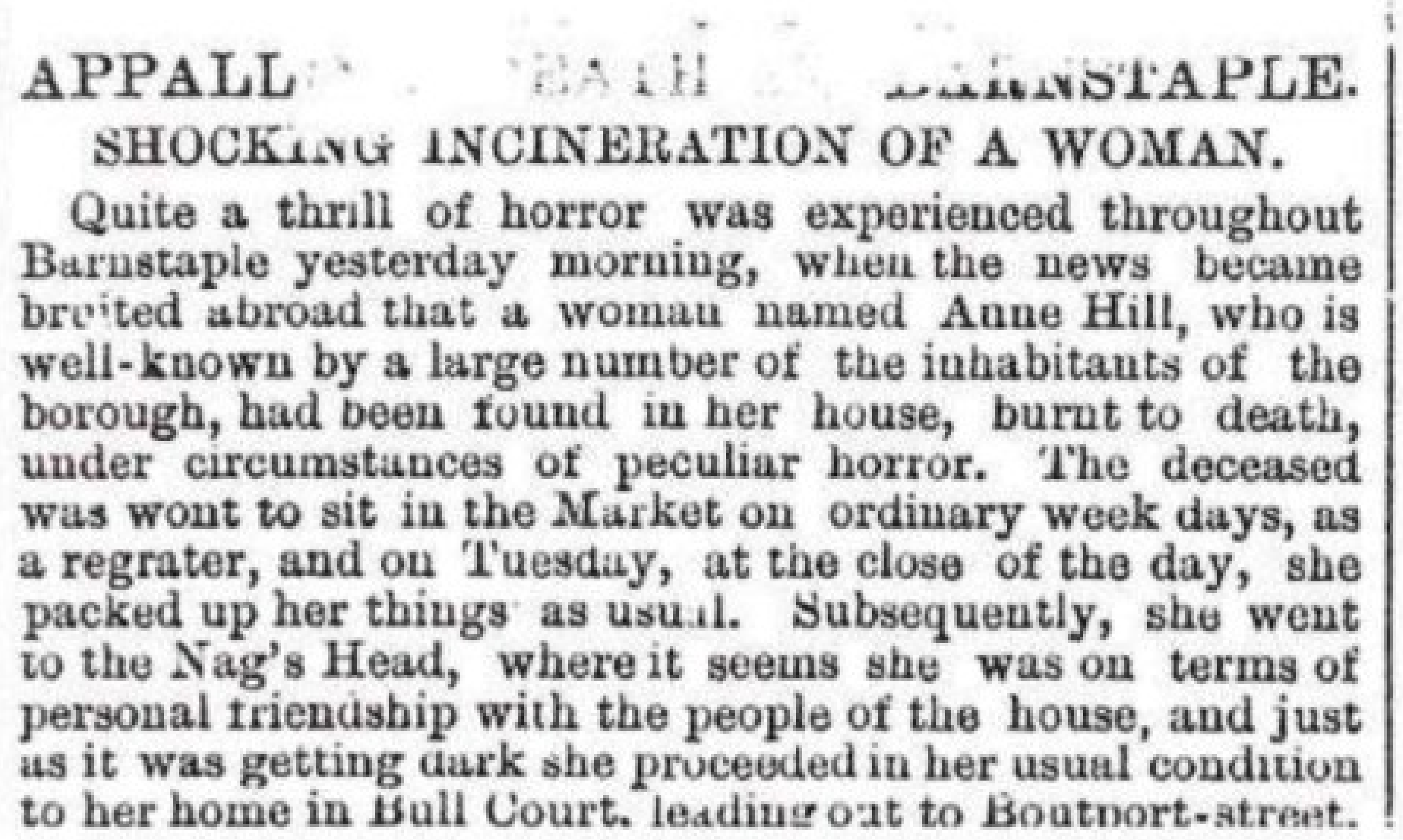

R. I. Bencraft.

NORTH DEVON ATHENAEUM

ABOVE: Entrance to Bull Court.
BELOW: Local coroner RI Bencraft.

PETER CHRISTIE

ABOVE: Barnstaple Market photographed around 1900.



APPALL EATH BARNSTAPLE.

SHOCKING INCINERATION OF A WOMAN.

Quite a thrill of horror was experienced throughout Barnstaple yesterday morning, when the news became bruited abroad that a woman named Anne Hill, who is well-known by a large number of the inhabitants of the borough, had been found in her house, burnt to death, under circumstances of peculiar horror. The deceased was wont to sit in the Market on ordinary week days, as a regrater, and on Tuesday, at the close of the day, she packed up her things as usual. Subsequently, she went to the Nag's Head, where it seems she was on terms of personal friendship with the people of the house, and just as it was getting dark she proceeded in her usual condition to her home in Bull Court, leading out to Boutport-street.

PETER CHRISTIE

Some things moved quickly in those days and the local coroner, RI Bencraft, called an inquest for the same afternoon. This was held in the Poltimore Arms, another local public house and, as was the custom, the jury was taken to view the body. This had been left *in situ* and, unsurprisingly, "presented a spectacle sickening in the extreme". One interesting fact was mentioned in passing – the remains were still smouldering when found, but had been extinguished prior to the jury trooping through the dead woman's cottage.

Mr Bencraft opened the inquest by talking about the "horrible nature" of Anne's death and the fact that her body "had been almost altogether cremated" with, he claimed, all the clothing burnt by the fire. He then called the first witness, Mary Hutchings, the 13-year-old granddaughter, who recounted how she had helped her grandmother pack up her vegetable stall on the day of her death and then next saw her when she found the body. On that morning, she had arrived at the cottage and taken down the shutters, but then couldn't find the key. Trying the door, she found it open and stepped into the kitchen, which was full of smoke. A "benzoline lamp" was alight on the table and what she saw had caused her to call for help, upon which various neighbours hurried to her aid.

One of these was the next witness. Mark Taylor, a labourer, who lived next door to Anne reported how Mary had called out: "Grandmother's house is on fire." He and a young man called Hancock rushed in, but couldn't see much through the thick smoke. Taylor sent Hancock off to fetch a policeman and as the smoke cleared saw that "[T]he deceased was burning around the head." It was he who then got some water and extinguished the fire. He completed his evidence by saying that he "didn't hear any screams, nor anything else during the night".

He was followed by PC Pugsley who, after being summoned by Hancock, noticed "a foot, and head, and some part of the shoulders of a human being", which were the only body parts in the room not "burnt to a cinder". He also found an empty lamp "much charred" about 3–4ft (90–120cm) from the body. Another report of the event in the *North Devon Journal* adds that Pugsley found "a can of benzoline on the table which had not been touched by fire". Additionally, some pictures were "knocked down from the mantelpiece" and "there was some crockery ware about". Most importantly, he added that "[T]here was no fire in the grate, which was quite cold."

Next to be questioned was William Philips, a painter, who added nothing new to the accounts of the others. Phoebe Acland, another neighbour, then reported how between 9 and 10pm the previous night, "Some smoke came through a partition to her place." She knocked at Anne's door, but received no answer, though she did notify John Lapthorne, the landlord of the Poltimore Arms and also apparently of the cottages. This wasn't the first time this had occurred, and he had previously put it down to smoke from Anne's fire penetrating through crevices in the wall, which suggests his property was in need of repair at the very least. According to the *Journal* report, he went to have a look, but apparently didn't do anything about it.

The final witness was Dr Henry Jackson, who had arrived at Anne's house at 9.15 that morning. Although Anne was unrecognisable due to the high degree of burning, there was "some portion of clothing near the fire place", which contradicted what the coroner had said. On examining the body, he found the surviving remains consisted just of the head, shoulders, right arm, right leg, and a "very much shrivelled" left arm. Everything else was "completely charred and destroyed by fire", though he could "just discern the pelvis bones". His rather unconvincing conclusion was that Anne had been filling her lamp when some oil fell on her dress, the fumes of which "would have been sufficient to stupefy her, and she would have remained burning".

The coroner, after revealing that "it was the most horrible case that he ever had had to deal with", advised the jury to return a verdict of "accidental burning" which they duly did – and with this Anne disappears into history.

So what are we to make of this report? All the elements associated with the "classic" cases of SHC are here. The victim was living alone and was evidently fond of alcohol. When she was found, there was a lot of smoke, and though it seems rare, it is not unknown for victims to be still "smouldering" when discovered, as Anne was. Much of the body was reduced to ashes, yet parts remained unburnt – as did at least some of the clothing. The other contents of the victim's room were unscathed, the fireplace was cold and the lamp merely charred – or even still alight if we are to believe Mary Hutchings.

The central mystery is how a human body, which consists mainly of water, can be reduced to ashes in an unenclosed situation. Cremations today generally take 2–3 hours at a temperature of up to 1,000° Celsius – and are helped by the presence of wooden coffins, which supply extra fuel. From the evidence, Anne's body seems to have been burning from around 9pm to 8am the next morning, but in a very "open" space. If we believe Mary's report that the lamp was still burning, then it is evident that oil in the lamp didn't provide the fuel to burn the body – and in any case lamp oil would soon have burnt away long before Anne's body was consumed. It is a great pity that no photographs of the scene were taken, but forensic photography was then in its very early infancy. One wonders how many other possible cases of SHC are still to be found in the pages of the Victorian provincial press – perhaps searching those already online using key terms such as "incineration", "combustion" or "cinders" might reveal them.

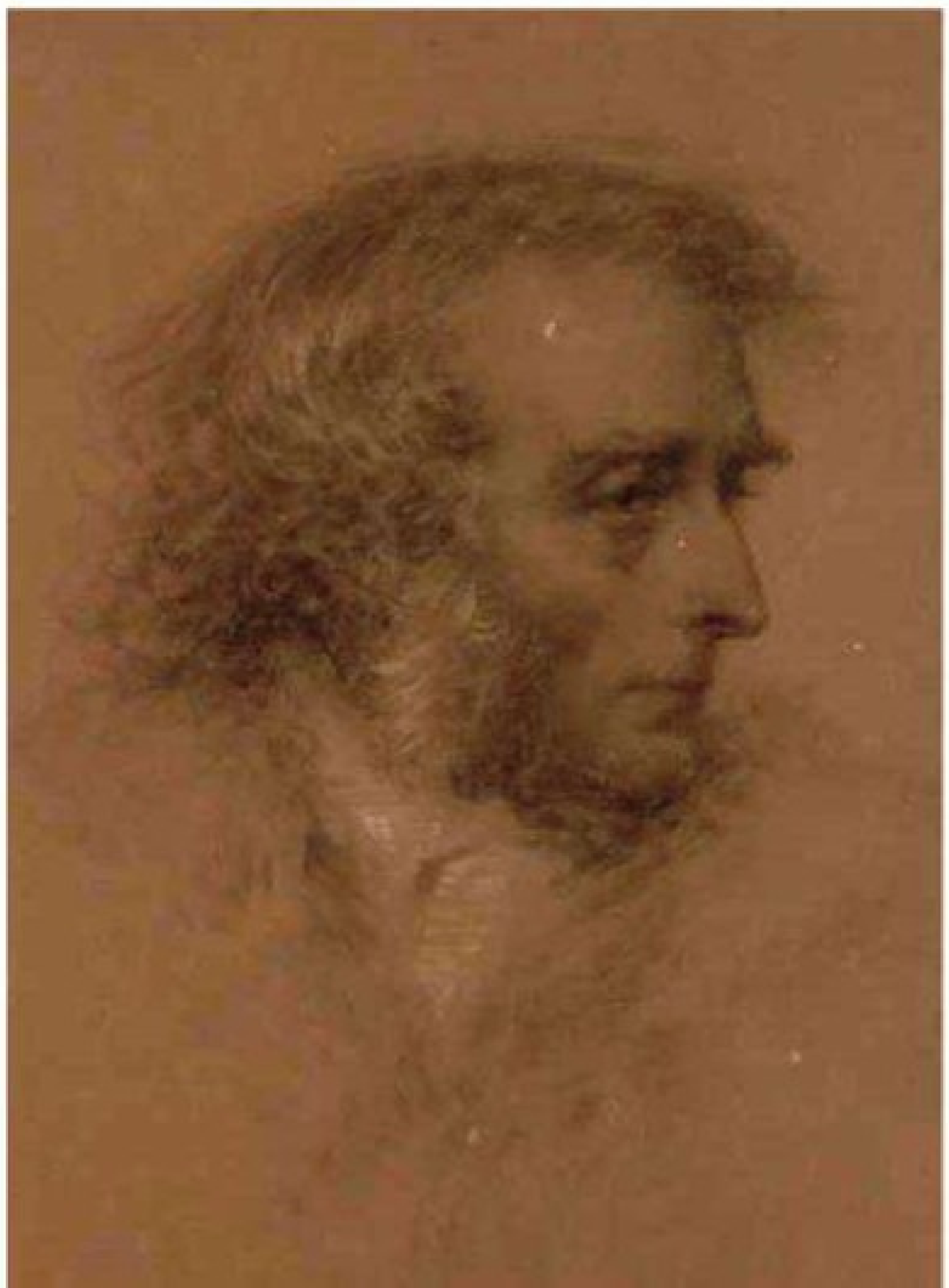
The Art of Apocalypse

MARTIN MYRONE, curator of a new Tate Britain exhibition devoted to the work of John Martin, examines the career of a misunderstood artist whose spectacular visions of biblical catastrophe have influenced the way we have imagined the end of the world ever since.

When, in 1922, HP Lovecraft visited New York, he went, on the recommendation of his friend Samuel Loveman, to the New York Public Library to view a set of early 19th-century prints based on John Milton's epic 17th-century poem *Paradise Lost*. What might seem to be an unpromising, even dryly scholastic, experience for this nascent master of the weird proved to be eye-opening. For the images in question were the acclaimed mezzotint prints of the British artist John Martin (1789–1854), which rendered Milton's arduously lengthy poem in terms of vast visual dramas, with (mainly) diminutive figures representing Adam and Eve, the angel Raphael, Satan, Sin and Death, playing out their epic drama in bleak and wondrous landscapes, monochrome visions of impossible worlds. In a private letter a few years later, really a kind of critical essay on the 19th-century artist and the challenge of visualising the truly wonderful, Lovecraft reported that he "was enthralled by the darkly thunderous, apocalyptically majestic, & cataclysmically unearthly power of one who, to me, seemed to hold the essence of cosmic mystery; notwithstanding the blandly low estimate placed upon his work by the tamely & urbanely correct artists & critics of his own period".[1] He continued:

"I would say that Martin's characteristic qualities were the use of vast space-suggestions, colossal effects of ancient architecture, & a daemon-dowered mastery of subtle & unearthly lighting effects amidst an all-engulfing gloom – the ravenous gloom of the outer void, whose *fluctus deumanus* beats so perilously on the frail dykes of our little world of light. The most typical Martin effect is that of a distant Babylon-like city or vision of a city bathed in some terrible supernal light – a form of æsthetic appeal so especially potent in my individual imagination that I may be inclined to give the artist too high a proportionate rating. To me, assuredly, he is one of the few preëminent giants of pictorial fantasy."

> "Vast space-suggestions, colossal effects of ancient architecture"



The mezzotint prints which so inspired Lovecraft sustained Martin's reputation, at least among a few dedicated followers, even when his art-historical reputation had plummeted dramatically. By the time Lovecraft was writing, Martin's name was a byword for Victorian bad taste and gross religious

LEFT: *John Martin on his Death Bed* (1854) by Charles Martin. **FACING PAGE:** *Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion* (1812), Martin's first major exhibited piece.

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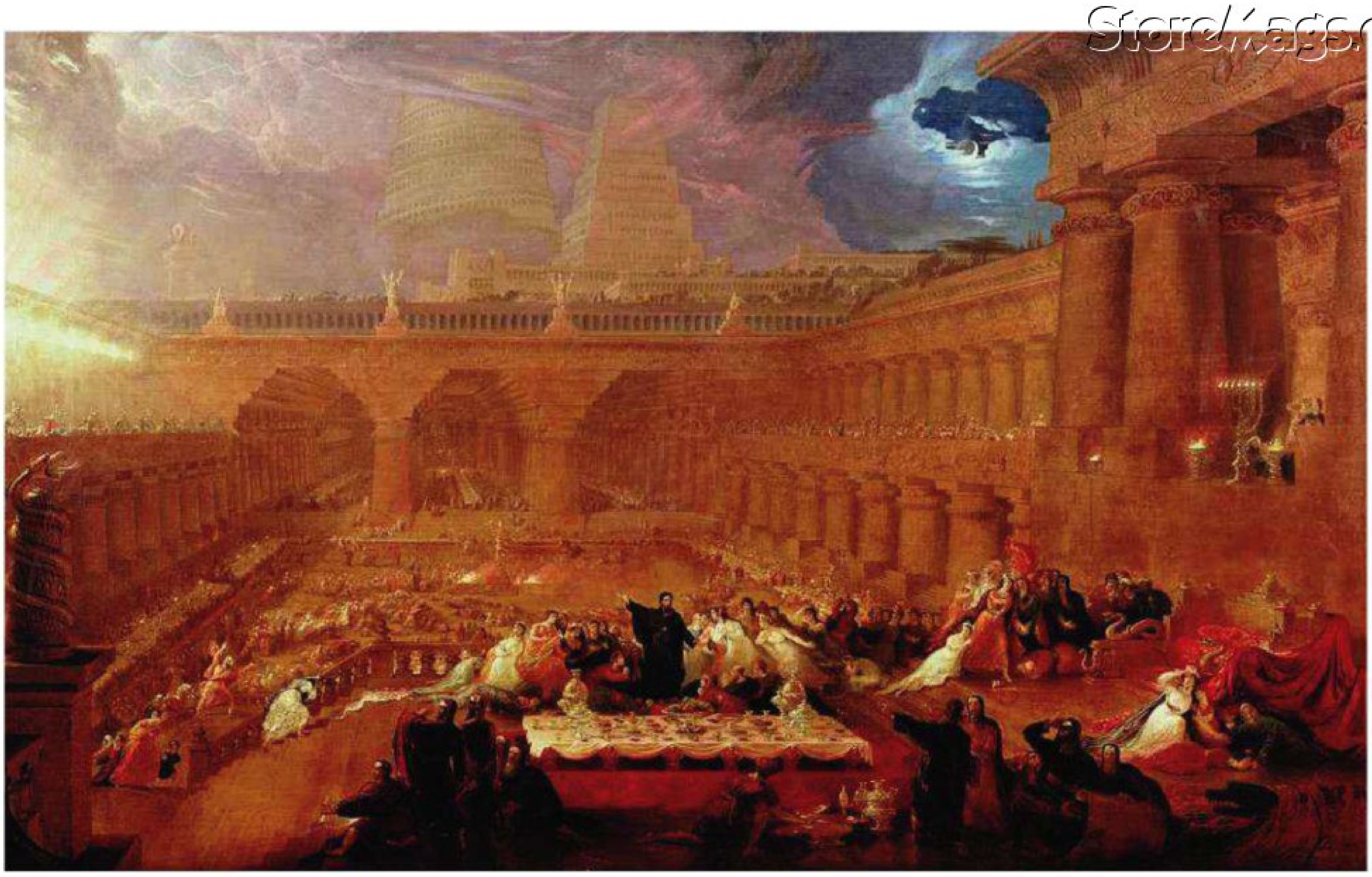

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ABOVE: *Belshazzar's Feast* (1820) secured Martin unprecedented fame – and notoriety – when it was shown at the British Institution in 1821.

sentiment. His scenes of mysterious prophecy and divine retribution, vast natural disasters, of Heaven, Hell and the most obscenely vast earthly palaces appealed only to the most outrageous tastes. Martin's dubious reputation has continued into modern times. He has, over time, attracted some interest from art historians, and his reputation as a rebellious outsider or religious visionary has lingered on, sustained by a romanticised version of 19th-century culture. But Martin's art is due a major reassessment. We are now able to see him in the context of a burgeoning urban culture of spectacular entertainments and new mass media, as an enterprising cultural entrepreneur addressing a mass taste for religious catastrophes, and as a complex individual with a complicated relationship with artistic authority. His visionary scenes of biblical catastrophe belonged, in an apparently paradoxical fashion, to a new, modern urban culture, and we can begin to see Martin as an artist who packaged prophecy in a peculiarly spectacular, modern and appealing fashion.

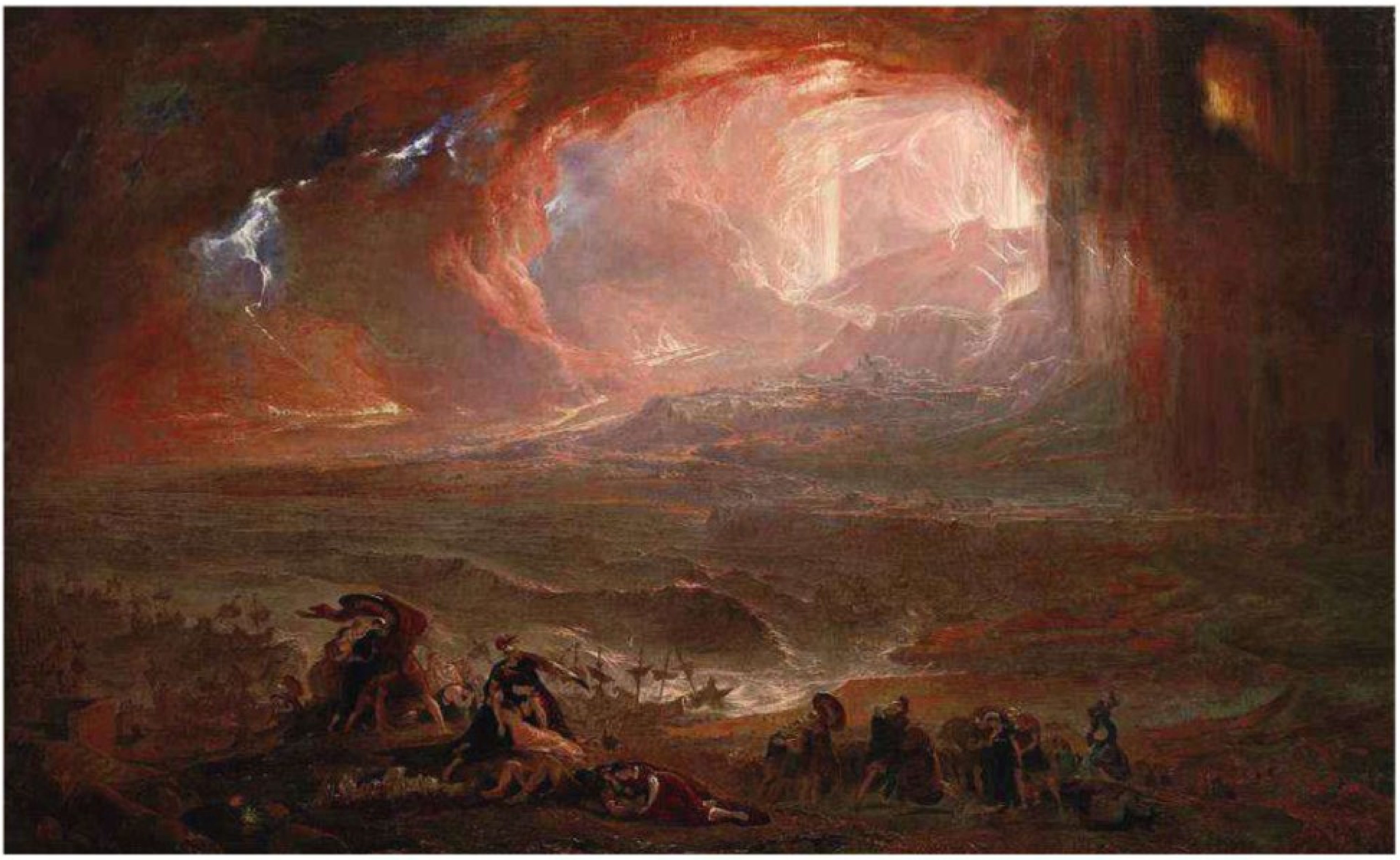
Crowds flocked to see Martin's 'Feast' in their thousands

Sensation and success

Martin's life story reflects a moment of extraordinary expansion and opportunity in British culture. He was born into an impoverished working-class family in rural Northumberland, and was sent, like his older brothers, into an apprenticeship in a trade. In Martin's case, this meant an apprenticeship with a coach-painter in Newcastle. Aspiring to greater things, Martin took lessons from a local drawing master, broke dramatically from his contract, and travelled down to London in 1806 hoping to make his way as an artist. With few connections in the London art world and no proper training as an oil painter, he struggled to make ends meet and pieced together a living giving drawing lessons and working as a glass and ceramic painter. His breakthrough as an artist came with the display in London's public art exhibitions of a succession of increasingly ambitious and striking paintings showing awesome landscapes and epic biblical catastrophes. *Sadak [Zadok] in Search of the Waters of Oblivion* was the first of these, shown at London's Royal Academy exhibition in 1812 and illustrating a popular orientalist fantasy through a weirdly conceived, towering volcanic landscape. This has become one of Martin's most widely reproduced images, evoking a potent sense of existential crisis, romantic alienation and proto-science fiction oddness. The domineering red of the colour scheme and strange spatial construction (Martin apparently heard the technicians hanging the painting at the Academy arguing over which way up it should be hung) may owe something to theatre design and popular optical entertainments rather than the conventions of high art.

He was beginning to make a name for himself, but it was the large picture of *Belshazzar's Feast*, first exhibited in the British Institution in 1821, which secured him unprecedented fame – and some degree of notoriety. The subject – the prophetic 'writing on the wall' which warns the king of Babylon, Belshazzar, that his blasphemy and luxuriousness will lead to the downfall of the city – had been painted by many artists before. But Martin's conception, dominated by the richly imaginative architecture that cobbles together archæological references with pure fantasy, struck an entirely novel note. Overawed by the mass of details and the pure visual sensationalism of the painting, crowds flocked in their thousands. The painting was reputedly the first on public exhibition in London to require a barrier to keep viewers back, such was the pressure of their numbers.

The startling success of the subsequent touring exhibition of *Belshazzar's Feast*, from which Martin appears not to have profited directly (having already sold the painting to his former employer, the glass painter William Collins), was a prompt for the one-man independent exhibition that Martin set up in London in 1822. The venue was the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, run by the highly entrepreneurial William Bullock. The Hall, with its striking faux-Egyptian exterior and ornate interiors realised in several different antique styles, had been the venue for several significant art exhibitions over the previous couple of years, notably that featuring Gericault's famous image of maritime disaster, *The Raft of the Medusa*. But these were run alongside a more diverse range of highly entertaining scientific and anthropological displays. So Martin's one-man art exhibition, which ran from 30 March to the end of July 1822, sat within a programme of varied



TATE BRITAIN

ABOVE: *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum*, which formed the centrepiece of Martin's 1822 exhibition in London's Egyptian Hall.

entertainments, including an exhibition on Lapland (running 15 January–4 April), the annual show of the Society of Painters in Watercolour (23 April–29 June), "The Terror of India" with a gigantic snake and other terrifying animals (late July), and the "African Museum of Natural History" (October).[2] The Lapland exhibition was particularly successful, and the presence of an actual family of native Laplandars, together with live (though tragically short-lived) reindeer proved fascinating for contemporary Londoners.

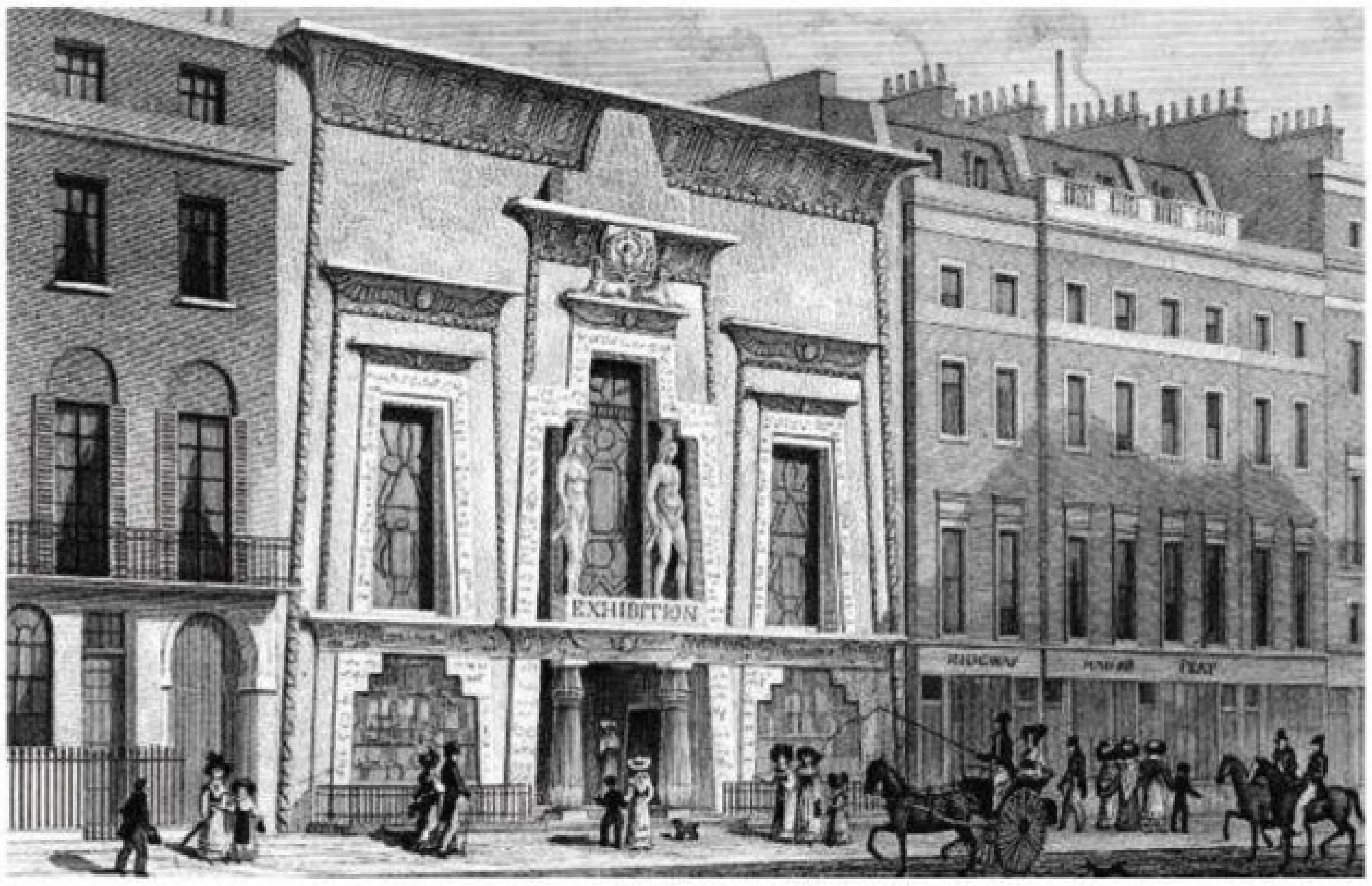
For the Egyptian Hall exhibition, Martin assembled the most impressive collection of his own works seen during his lifetime, borrowing several back from their current owners. The centrepiece was a new painting, depicting what was, then as now, the most famous natural disaster of all time: *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum*. The expansive landscape that Martin conceived showed the extent of the disaster which beset the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum on 24 August AD 79. Taking as its vantage point the shores of the town of Stabia, on the opposite side of the Bay of Naples, the picture has a multitude of fleeing survivors struggling on to dry land. Herculaneum is in the distance to the left, smothered with vivid lava; Pompeii is laid out in sufficient detail to be able to identify specific buildings, most prominently the circular 'great Theatre' and the Basilica. Vesuvius is shown in the early stages of the eruption, the glow of lava colouring the whole landscape a vivid red, while the sky is convulsed by billowing ash-clouds and shredded by lightning. The only primary account of the disaster, by Pliny the Younger, noted that as the ash clouds blackened the sky the whole scene was illuminated weirdly by the glow of lava.

Given Martin's interest in the representation of artificial light effects, already amply demonstrated in *Belshazzar's Feast*, it seemed to some inevitable that Martin would turn to this subject.

In an ironic twist, Martin's painting was badly damaged in its own catastrophe in January 1928 when the basement of the Tate Gallery was flooded. It has been restored for display in the current exhibition. The picture, seen in public for the first time in a century (the Tate had kept it in storage before the flood) can now be revealed as one of the artist's most extravagant and vivid efforts, and the raw reds and pinks which alarmed some critics in 1822 can be seen properly again. Looking at the picture now, it is hard not to see it as the template for the familiar, overblown effects of the modern disaster film, with its fleeing crowds, convulsed sea and tempestuous sky, buildings engulfed, and the multitude of individual human dramas – the rich man dead under the rubble, still clutching vainly at his gold, a mother mourning her dead child, an old man collapsing into the arms of his friend, and so on.

Serious spectacle

We could quite readily reconstruct a genealogy connecting Martin's oil painting to contemporary cinema; Edward Bulwer-Lytton was an acknowledged admirer of Martin, taking inspiration from the artist



GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

ABOVE: The flamboyant Egyptian Hall on London's Piccadilly was home to both art and entertainment.

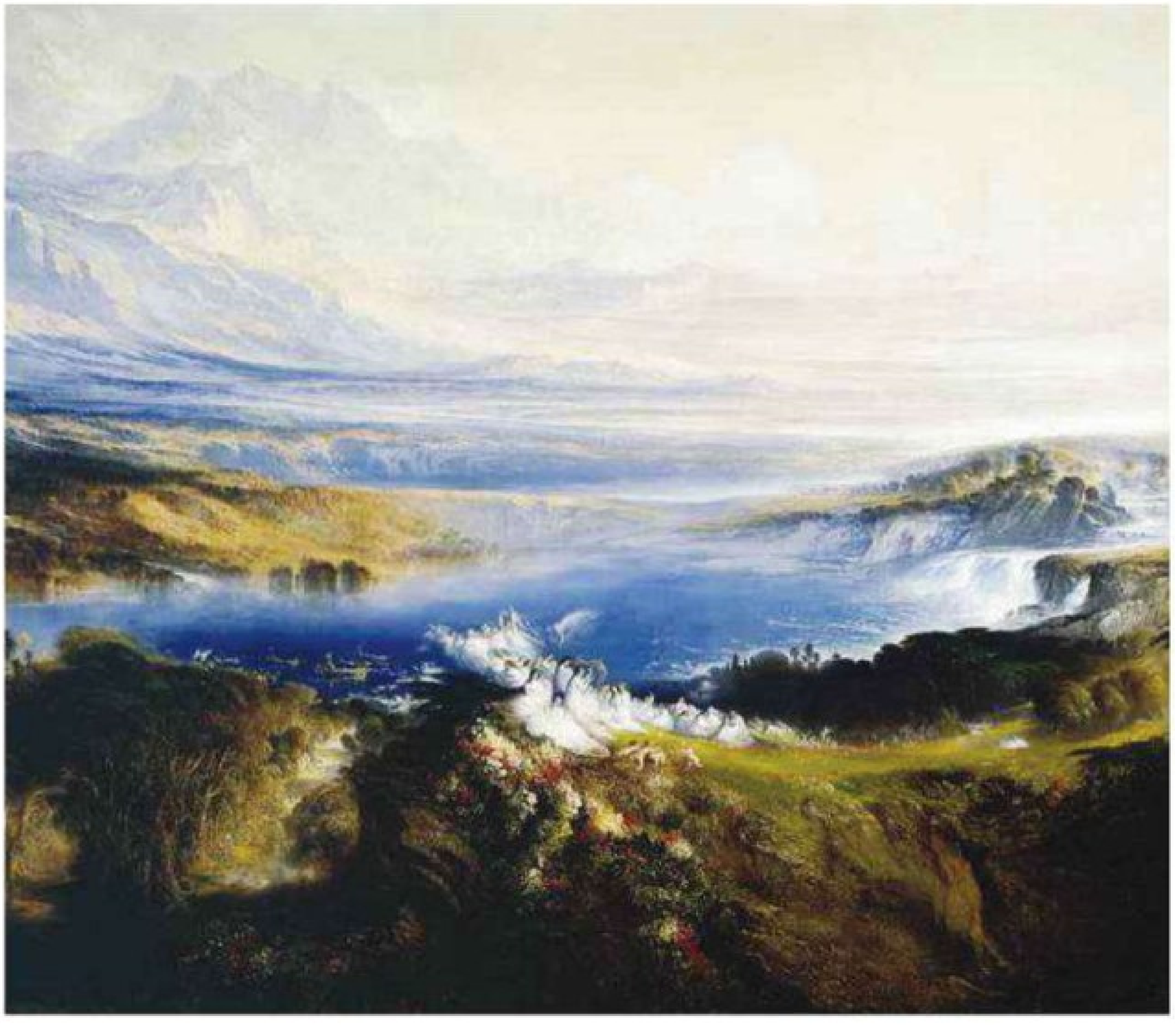
for his massively successful novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), which was in turn dramatised as popular spectacle (involving fireworks and special effects) in the late 19th century and then, naturally enough, in early cinema and the first, seminal blockbuster disaster films.[3] As an exhibit at the Egyptian Hall, the painting could certainly be cast as a kind of popular entertainment which touched on the credulity and susceptibility of supposedly 'naïve' visitors. A satirical piece in the *London Magazine* had a provincial visitor reporting (in an idiosyncratically spelled letter) on the pictures in the show, and referring to her young daughter's shocked response to this work:

"But oh Mrs Price how shall I tell you about the burning of Herculaneum! Becky said it put her in mind of what is written in Revelations, about the sky being turned to blood, and indeed it seemed to take all the culler out of her face when she looked at it. It looked as if all the world was going to be burnt to death with a shower of live coals! – Oh dear! To see the poor things running about in sich an earthquack as threw the pillars off their legs… It is a shocking site to see only in a picter, with so many people in silks and satins and velvets having their things so scorched and burnt into holes!"[4]

The fictional narrator goes on to describe her visit to the "Bonassus", "as it is but a step from the wan to the other". This was an American bison, being shown with a five-legged cow and a host of other interesting creatures at the 'Grand Repository of Natural History' in the Strand.[5]

But if paintings like *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* anticipate the attractions of freak shows and cinematic spectacle, with all that implies about instantaneous, superficial gratification, Martin was intent that they also be taken seriously as works of art and as historical records. In the original exhibition of 1822, the painting was accompanied by a pamphlet including a lengthy description of the painting's subject and a line etching providing a key to people and key buildings in the cities. Martin was able to refer to Edwin Atherstone's recent poem on the theme, and to Sir William Gell's and Joseph Gandy's scholarly *Pompeiana* (1819) to elucidate his presentation of the disaster. He was particularly at pains to insist upon the correct "scale of proportion" he had applied in representing the scene from the elevated position of Stabia, and included in the exhibition a "Plan of the Country, in the vicinity of Vesuvius, shewing the situation of the Cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum; also the portion of the sea and country included in the picture".

As the historian Ralph O'Connor has discussed, the descriptive pamphlets that Martin produced to go with his major paintings were intended to lead to viewers dwelling over these works, reflecting and digesting in a way we are perhaps rather unfamiliar with.[6] These pictures combined erudition and showmanship, studiousness and sheer imagination. We may find such combinations a bit queasy, but Martin was not merely being eccentric. His approach matches tendencies in the popular science and archæology of the day. He counted as friends many figures from these worlds, including the scientists Michael Faraday and Charles Wheatstone, the fossil hunters Gideon Mantell and Thomas Hawkins, and the antiquarian John Britton, for whom he provided a revealingly speculative realisation of the prehistoric landscape of Avebury for the belated third volume of Britton's *Beauties of Wiltshire* (published 1825). Martin's design shows an enormously lengthy funeral procession entering the vast spiral of standing stones imagined as making up the ancient temple. With its panoramic perspective, and the orderly presentation of the site and ancient Britons themselves, Martin's image matches the more positive contemporary view of 'primitive' British society as essentially benign, decorous and only vaguely mystical.[7] While Britton in his accompanying text rejected the "*visionary* theories" about the site which projected religious or spiritual qualities onto the landscape, he also insisted that one might "indulge in speculation and conjecture" and therefore be allowed to "*amuse oneself* in forming theories, which it would be impossible to establish, either by fact or argument". The possibility of enjoying historical and architectural speculations as a form of amusement, without the hope of securing absolute scholarly truths, seems key to the way Martin himself expected his art to be appreciated. Writing a few years later of his artistic recreations of the lost cities of Nineveh and Babylon, he pointed to a similar belief in the right to poetic licence on the part of the painter, which need not, however, lead to sheer visionary invention or simple fancy: "where strict truth is not essential, the mind is content to find delight in the contemplation of the grand and the marvellous".[8] Martin's panoramic view of the Avebury landscape, with its primitive architecture stretching back into the limitless distance and a vast multitude in snaking procession conveying a near incomprehensible sense of scale, conforms to this free (but not undisciplined) pursuit of the "grand and the marvellous". Later in his career, he was insistent that in painting the night sky of what would appear to be a wholly fantastical landscape in *Arthur and Aegle in the Happy Valley* he had "taken every pain to make my picture astronomically correct",[9] which is, apparently true too of the ominous conjunction of Sun, Moon and comet which heralded the Biblical flood in his luminous scenes of the *Eve of the Deluge*.

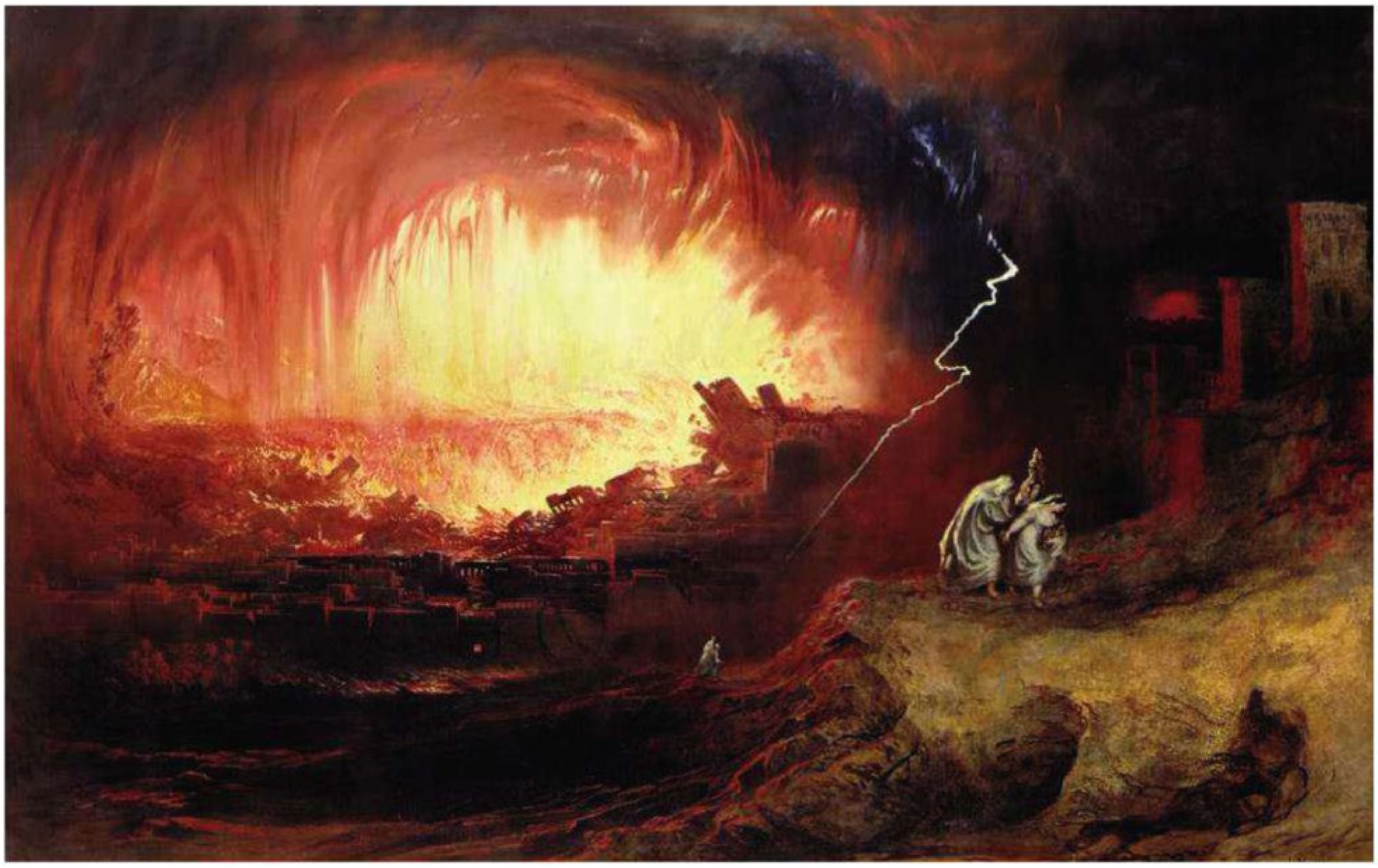


TATE BRITAIN

ABOVE: Detail from *The Plains of Heaven* (1851–3), as the good assemble at the Last Judgement.

Mad Martin?

Popular as his art was with the public, Martin never received the sort of official accolades he hoped for. He was, most notably, never elected to London's leading art institution, the Royal Academy of Arts, and he felt that some of its members looked down their noses at him. Accordingly, he has often been cast as an artistic rebel or outsider, although he received royal patronage and was enormously proud of his associations with the social elite. Moreover, there is every indication that he was a highly rational, sociable and well turned-out individual. HP Lovecraft was rather nearer the mark than a lot of later commentators, who have tended to assume that Martin was unbalanced, confused, inspired by dreams, drugs or religious visions. What Lovecraft identified was the logical basis of Martin's visionary excesses; he was, correctly,



TATE BRITAIN / LAING ART GALLERY / TYNE & WEAR MUSEUMS

ABOVE: *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* (1852) as Lot's family is saved while the sinful perish in the story from Genesis.

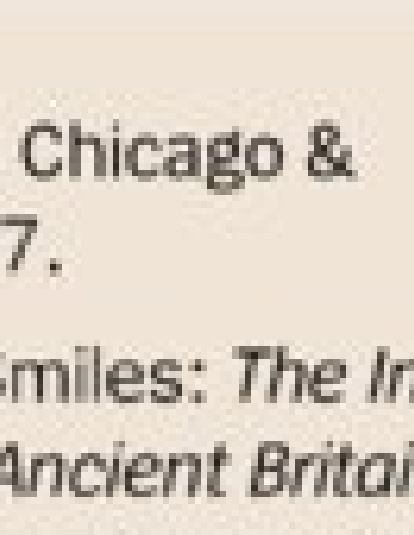
sceptical of the long-standing rumours that the artist was 'an opium-eater' ("a stock rumour so frequently raised by the vulgar against an artist of fantastic attainments" – in fact, Martin was clean-living and proud of his athletic achievements), and moreover, identified that, essentially, "Martin was not at all inclined to the fantastic or grotesque. He had none of the weird subjective primitiveness & spiritual symbolism of Blake, or of the weird decorative grotesquerie of the living artist [Sidney] Sime. It is more fitting to compare him with Gustave Doré, since his scenes were always conceived in the external spirit of classic naturalism, the element of terror, mystery or sublimity being infused by a process much subtler than mere distortion". Martin's enduring reputation as 'Mad' Martin, a label which continues to be reused in ostensibly reputable contexts, derives largely from the confusion between the painter John and his brother Jonathan, who suffered religious delusions and who in 1829 set fire, spectacularly, to York Minster, leading to a nationwide manhunt and his spending the rest of his life in Bethlem Hospital (Bedlam) where he created wildly unbalanced drawings. That another brother, William, was a thoroughgoing eccentric who proclaimed himself a 'natural philosopher' and the inventor of a perpetual motion machine hardly helped John Martin's reputation.[10]

Nonetheless, towards the end of his life Martin did play an active part in securing for posterity a reputation as a religious eccentric. For his final artistic project, one that brought his art an audience of many millions around the world, was based on no less a subject than the end of the world, as prophesied in the Book of Revelation, a topic that connected with the religious fervour and millenarian expectations of contemporary popular religion. The paintings were completed shortly before his death in February 1854, and were immediately put out on a commercial tour that saw the pictures feature in every major British town and city, where they were marketed boldly to a mass audience of ordinary believers. With special ticket offers for Sunday School groups, late night openings for the working classes, and breathlessly excited marketing, this was art truly being pitched at the masses.

The sheer popularity of Martin's last pictures helped condemn them in the eyes of many critics, and by the beginning of the 20th century the paintings lay neglected in storage. The religious subject matter and bombastic visual effects of these works were simply too out of keeping with the values of the modern cultural elite. When Martin's reputation started to be revived in the 1940s, it was mainly in the guise of an oddball figure, an eccentric, a visionary outsider, a kind of proto-Surrealist.

The more complex, historical John Martin, a man of reason who worked for a mass market inclined towards religious sensationalism, a populist who relished his royal connections, a showman who wanted establishment recognition, is only now beginning to be revealed.

Author biography



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NOTES

1 Letter from HP Lovecraft to Vincent Starrett, 10 Jan 1928, in August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, eds: *Selected letters 1923–1929*, Wisconsin, 1968.

2 Michael P Costeloe: *William Bullock: Connoisseur and Virtuoso of Egyptian Hall: Piccadilly to Mexico (1773–1849)*, Bristol, 2008.

3 On spectacles of Pompeii in the 19th century, see Nick Yablon: "'A Picture Painted in Fire': Pain's Reenactment of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 1879–1914", in Victoria C Gardner Coates & Jon L. Seydl: *Antiquity Recovered: The Legacy of Pompeii and Herculaneum*, Los Angeles, 2007, pp189–205.

4 "Mr Martin's Pictures and the Bonassus", *London Magazine*, May 1822, p428.

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6 Ralph O'Connor: *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science, 1802–1856*, Chicago & London, 2007.

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9 Letter from Martin to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 7 April 1849, Hertfordshire Record Office, DE/K/C11/34.

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Pyro-poltergeists

PAUL CROPPER investigates a recent outbreak of poltergeist-like activity in Malaysia linked to mischievous, fire-starting spirits called *djinn*, while **TONY HEALY** tells the story of a similarly pyromaniacal spook from 1930s Australia.

Between May and December 2010, a series of strange incidents occurred in the home of a 73-year-old widow, Zainab Sulaiman, in a village near Kota Bharu, Malaysia. Objects disappeared and reappeared, clothes were found cut to shreds, food scraps were strewn across beds and large quantities of salt and smelly fish sauce were dumped into cooking pots.

It was all decidedly annoying, but Zainab and her family – a widowed daughter-in-law and two granddaughters – didn't find it particularly frightening: they were merely being pestered, they assumed, by a mildly mischievous spirit. Even when a pair of trousers, missing for three days, reappeared inside the refrigerator, they remained calm, hoping the imp would tire of its tricks.

But in mid-December the weirdness escalated dangerously: over the next 10 weeks, dozens of small fires broke out on clothes, rugs, linoleum and mattresses throughout the residence. Sometimes several occurred within a few minutes; on one hectic day there were no fewer than 78 separate fires!

Although all were quickly extinguished and surprisingly little damage was done, Zainab didn't get a lot of sleep during those weird weeks. Her flimsy wooden dwelling, elevated on stumps and packed with clothes and bolts of cloth, was a veritable tinderbox and she didn't dare leave it unattended.

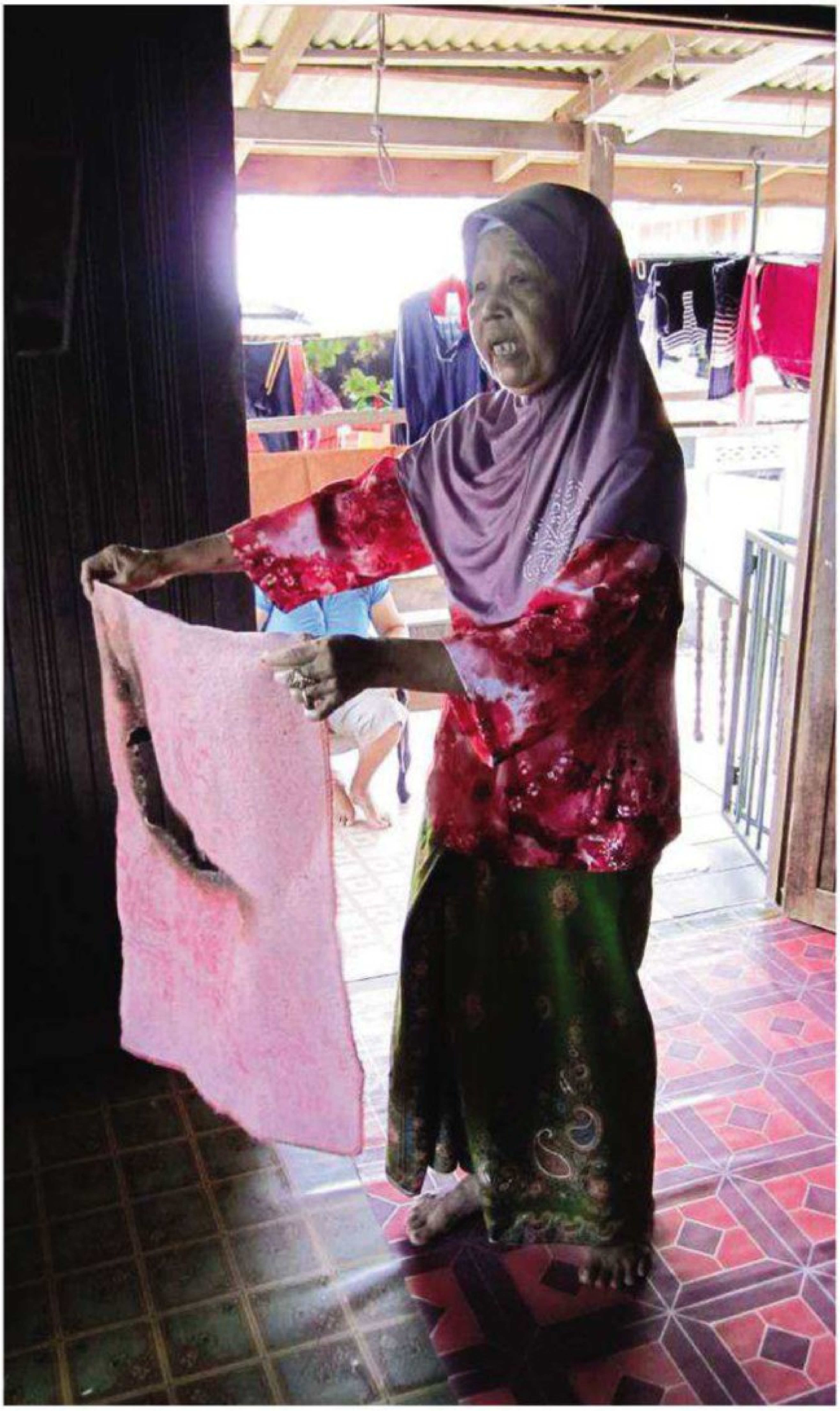
STOP THAT INFERNAL DJINN!

News of the weirdness spread quickly. On 4 January, a group of Muslim holy men arrived and declared the house was infested by invisible entities known as *djinn*. (*Djinn* is the plural; the masculine singular is *djinni* – or genie).

Djinn have featured prominently in Middle Eastern folklore since time immemorial (see **FT147:30–33** for more on *djinn*) and Mohammed, under the direction of the angel Gabriel, incorporated them into Muslim theology. Many of the tricks they reputedly play are highly reminiscent of those often attributed, in other cultures, to poltergeists.

Not all of their behaviour corresponds with poltergeist phenomena observed in "the West", but a significant amount of it does. Both djinn and polts:

- Take possession of buildings or locales



PAUL CROPPER

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and "persecute terribly any person who goes [to live there]".[1]

- Throw stones at people.[2]
- Travel great distances at blinding speed.[3]
- Sometimes possess humans and hijack their vocal chords to speak.[4]
- Are usually invisible and use their invisibility to frighten people.[5]
- Are "fearful… by nature, but can feel emotions [such as] anger or sadness… *djinn* benefit from these states, being better able to cause fear in [humans]… when they sense your fear, they will attack."[6]
- Can take the form of humans, black dogs, black cats and other animals.[7]
- Can be good or neutrally benevolent but are generally "ignorant, oppressive and treacherous".[8]
- "Lift items into the air unseen".[9]
- Mimic the voices of deceased humans.[10]

The holy men concentrated their chanting on a set of ancient swords, knives, and brassware that they thought the *djinn* had "possessed". Perhaps, they suggested, Zainab's parents, to whom the objects had originally belonged, had flirted with black magic. Be that as it may, their "cleansing" ceremony, far from defusing the situation, seemed merely to annoy the fire-starter(s): on the very next day, 46 blazes broke out.

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The 'cleansing' failed to defuse the situation: next day, 46 blazes broke out.

ABOVE: Zainab Sulaiman's house in Kota Bharu. **FACING PAGE:** Zainab holds a towel burnt by the 'djinn'. **LEFT:** A scorched cushion.

But while their exorcism failed, something recorded by photographer Zulhanifa Sidek might indicate that the holy men were correct in identifying the hot-fingered imps as *djinn*.

Zulhanifa witnessed two fires. One flame, licking up from a stack of clothing in a cupboard, struck him as being unusually bright and well-defined. Even more remarkable was the fact that, as his photographs show, it was completely smokeless. Perhaps significantly, the Koran (55:15) states: "And the *djinn* did he create from a smokeless flame of fire".

Several other ghostbusters tried to douse the *djinn*. Ong Q Leng, a photogenic, flamboyantly-dressed "miracle-working doctor", performed kung-fu-like motions to expel the spooks and "lock" the house. "I could sense an evil presence the moment I stepped [in]", she said. "There are little djinns [*sic*] under the house [and] big ones outside." While claiming to have chased them away, she left herself with a small 'out': "There is a 50–50 chance they will return."

PARANORMAL PRANKS

Of all the journalists who covered her story, Zainab considered Syed Azhar, of the Kuala

FLAMING HECK!

TONY HEALY recounts the tale of the Vengeful Spook of Cannibal Creek.

During the 1870s, the Palmer River goldfield in far north Queensland was the scene of much greed-stoked mayhem. Gun-toting prospectors slaughtered courageous but poorly-armed Aboriginal warriors, violence flared between European and Chinese miners and malaria stalked the camps. A few instances of cannibalism did nothing to lighten the atmosphere.

It seems, therefore, quite appropriate that the polt which sprang from that bloody ground was the most malevolent in our Australian file.

After the gold petered out, a few diehards stayed on at the Palmer, prospecting for tin along its tributaries. In March 1935, during the Great Depression, as Joe Jones and his mate Dick Clarke were eking out a living on Cannibal Creek, the poltergeist began its rampage.

Three years later, Joe wrote a detailed account of the terrifying episode. (Reprinted in Historical Society, Cairns, North Queensland, Bulletin 145, Oct 1971).

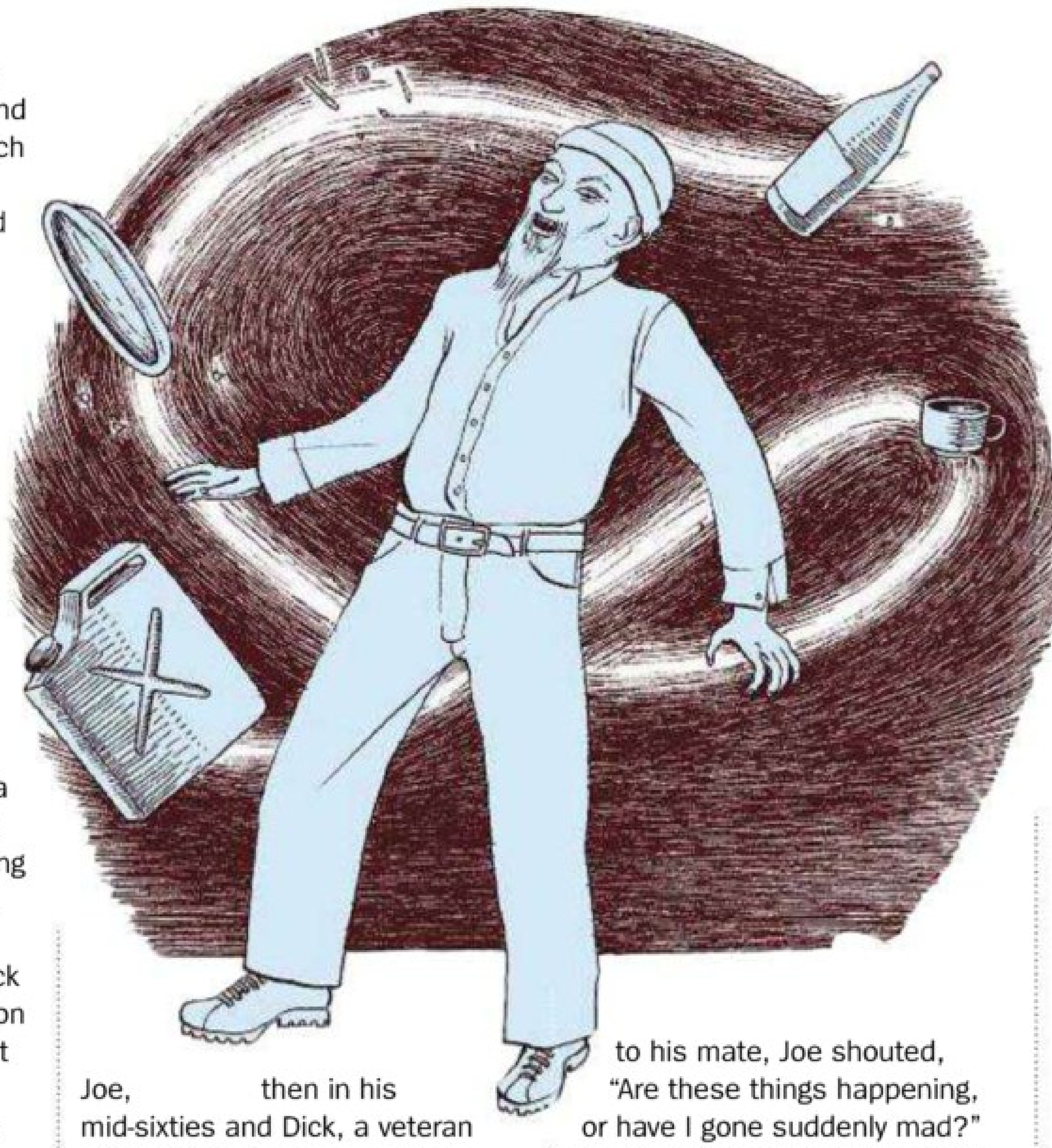
Four miles (6.4km) north of Cannibal Creek, Jimmy Ah Quay, a veteran of the 1870s rush, lived alone, fossicking for tin on Granite Creek. His only neighbour was another old Chinese man who was “suffering from some loathsome disease”, apparently leprosy. Bravely, Quay cooked and cared for him and, in January 1935, when the poor man died, buried him; then, he burnt his hut and everything in it.

In February, Quay took his packhorses 70 miles (120km) to the nearest town of Laura, returning with provisions, gelignite and a young Australian-born Chinese, Willie Hip Wah, who was expected to help with the mining.

A few days later, Joe and Dick were surprised to see the old man and his offsider (helper) approaching their camp through the heavy monsoon rain, “carrying their swags on bamboos”.

Trouble in the camp

“My place haunted,” Quay told his friends. “We can’t live there; ghost come; he break up everything.”



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

Joe, then in his mid-sixties and Dick, a veteran of World War I, were sceptical: “Neither of us believed in ghosts or spiritualism.” So when Quay asked them to help retrieve his other possessions, the men readily agreed, saying, “We will catch the ghost for you as well… [you won’t] have to shift…”

“No matter,” replied Quay, “you see.”

Next morning, when the party arrived at Quay’s camp, Joe and Dick *did* see.

No sooner had they unsaddled the horses than they “took fright, broke down [the] yard and galloped away, swimming over Granite Creek with the hobbles on”.

Still unfazed, and suspecting that young Willie, who probably wanted to get back to civilisation, was hoaxing the old man, Joe said he would now “investigate… and catch the ghost”. No sooner had he spoken that he “noticed some coils of fuse were jumping onto the floor. There were six coils hung on a peg… They jumped down one at a time… I put it back [and] it all jumped back [down].”

And so it began: all afternoon, plates lifted off the table and hit the galvanised iron roof; cups and billycans jumped about and bounced off the iron walls. By nightfall, “it was just a tornado; bottles, dishes, kerosene tins and scrap iron were thrown about… making a terrible din.” Turning to his mate, Joe shouted, “Are these things happening, or have I gone suddenly mad?” To which Dick replied, “Too right they’re happening… a hop [battle] over in France was a picnic compared to this.” Interestingly, when objects levitated “you could see a faint light moving… through the room.”

Even when they retreated outdoors, poor old Quay was blitzed with plates, bottles, sticks and stones, and something smashed two lanterns Joe was carrying.

The weirdness progressed from being merely amazing to downright sinister. After Willie retired to bed, the men heard a frantic call: “Joe, Dick. Come quick; he smother me.” Rushing to Willie’s side, they “found a rug completely wrapped around his head” and had some difficulty in unwinding it – by which time the boy was unconscious. They took him outdoors and kept him under observation, but he remained comatose until dawn.

Throughout the night, they heard a strange tapping outside, and mournful groans. But Quay made a confident prediction: “Cock crow, he stop,” and sure enough, as soon as the rooster crowed all was quiet… until about 7am, when all hell broke loose.

With the four of them outside, loud rapping came from indoors, and objects, including heavy mining equipment, began to fly out the door. Then fires began inside. Joe saw several start on the floor. “I tried to smother them, but blazes would start up where there was nothing to burn.” He carried some burning objects outside, but it was no use.

As the shack went up in flames, Joe noted another strange thing: only 4ft (1.3m) from the blazing structure was a thatched-roofed fowl house, with tomatoes growing along its wall; yet while “the tomato plants were turned to cinders… the fowl house did not catch fire”, even though debris from the burning hut fell against it.

The phantom hitchhiker

Singed and shaken, the men rode back to Cannibal Creek, but they couldn’t outrun the pesky polt: like some other migratory Aussie examples (see “A Stone’s Throw”, **FT116:38**), it simply hitched a ride.

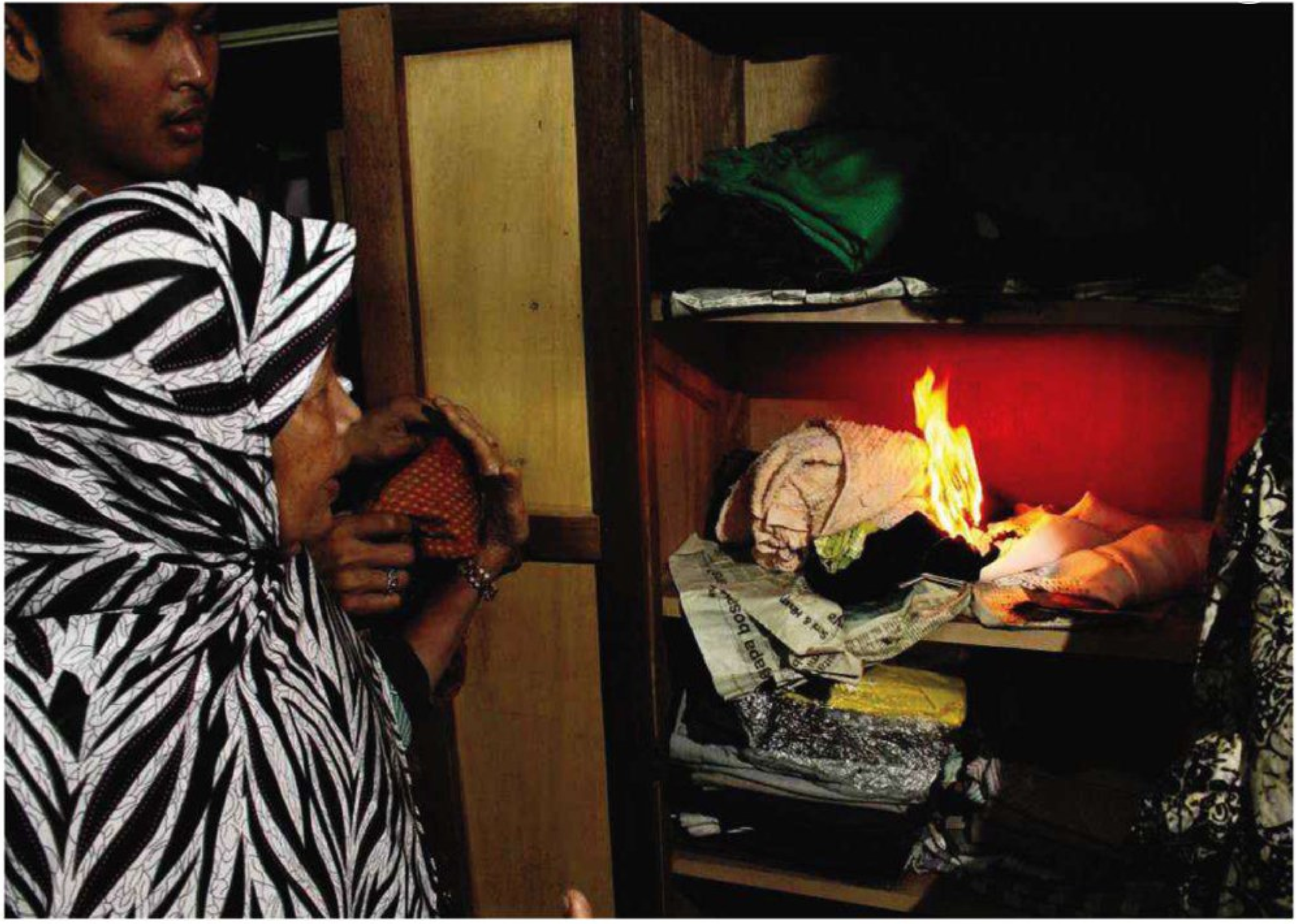
Joe and Dick’s nearest neighbour was an old Italian who, on listening incredulously to their tale, made fun of their “ghost”. He changed his tune, however, when “the business started [again]… tins and bottles jumping around, hitting walls… The old Italian nearly had a fit. He could not hunt the Chinamen away quick enough.”

That evening, back at Joe’s hut, “everything in the place”, including a hurricane lamp, “started to jump down and hit Willie”. Then Quay and Joe were pelted with old tins until dawn when, mercifully, the pest apparently decided it had made its point, and left them alone at last.

While some researchers resist the notion that spirits of the dead instigate polt events (and while that doesn’t conform to Muslim *djinn* lore), the fact that his own hut had recently been burnt strongly suggests that the late lamented leper really did torch Quay’s shack. Quay – who said at the time, “I burn him, he burn me” – clearly thought so.

Ah Quay never returned to his camp; he obtained work elsewhere and in 1947 sailed for his old home, China. Willie Hip Wah took up baking and went on to become a prosperous and popular citizen of Cooktown.

Thankfully, while polts are often mischievous, they rarely start fires. The Cannibal Creek spook was even more unusual in that it seemed bent on physically harming, perhaps even killing, one of its hapless victims.



PAUL CROPPER / ZULHANIFA SIDEK

ABOVE: A mysterious fire in a cupboard in Zainab Sulaiman's house, captured by local news photographer Zulhanifa Sidek, December 2010.
BELOW: Zainab points to a fan scorched by the 'djinn'.

Lumpur *Star*, the most accurate and sympathetic. She took to phoning him when the invisible arsonist was most active, and during five visits to her house he interviewed all those involved and witnessed some of the attempted exorcisms.

When I met Syed in Kuala Lumpur in February 2011, he was still wavering between accepting the episode as supernatural and dismissing it as a hoax. He'd witnessed several fires but hadn't actually seen them start, nor had he witnessed objects teleporting. He had, however, interviewed people other than Zainab's family who *had* seen such things, including one who'd seen a fire burning, impossibly, on a wet towel. He was sure Zainab was sane and honest, and found it difficult to believe the daughter-in-law or granddaughters could have started so many fires without being caught.

He did, however, note that 13-year-old Wan Nurfatifa seemed to "know" when fires were starting and was usually the first to find and extinguish them. She said she "smelled" them.

Because he knew that poltergeist activity is often focused on adolescent girls, Syed didn't think that Wan's fire-spotting talent necessarily meant she was hoaxing. Similarly, her revelation that her sweater had caught fire on a school bus, rather than suggesting she was a hoaxer, might have indicated she was the unwitting catalyst for a polt's paranormal pranks.

When Syed took me to the house on 19 February, I was favourably impressed by the energetic, motherly Zainab, who obviously had a loving relationship with her quietly-spoken daughter-in-law and well-behaved grandkids. But I was dismayed to learn that all had been quiet on the *djinn* front for the previous 10 days – the longest period of peace thus far experienced.

I needn't have worried: that evening the *djinn* – or somebody – obliged by starting two fires in quick succession. The first began at about 9.15pm while Syed and I were in the living room and the entire family were out of sight in the kitchen. We didn't become aware of it until Zainab walked calmly up the corridor carrying a smouldering cushion. The semi-circular burnt patch was pretty impressive but – call me an old sceptic – on entering the kitchen I noted that the (also circular) gas ring was burning.

PAUL CROPPER

Five minutes later, I noticed 11-year-old Nur Fatili pointing excitedly into a bedroom. On entering, we found a nylon blouse smouldering. Again, not very dramatic; but as the blouse was one of many hanging very close together, it did seem rather odd that the fire hadn't spread.

Although both events might have been genuinely paranormal, neither would have (ahem) set a sceptic's world on fire. As the incidents were the first to have occurred in 10 days, I found the family's calm, even happy, demeanour rather surprising. Perhaps it was a "cultural thing", but there was certainly nothing like the level of excitement I'd observed (and experienced) during the Humpty Doo polt episode of 1998 (see "Stone Me!", **FT116:34–39**). I also thought I detected an element of "show" when the cushion was brought out. Even so, I found it very difficult to think ill of kindly Zainab. Perhaps, I mused, she'd faked things "just this once" so as not to disappoint one who'd travelled so far to visit.

On the other hand, it had previously been noted at Kota Bharu (as at other reputed polt sites) that the arrival of strangers often triggered brief upsurges of weird activity.

Then I examined a banknote that had supposedly appeared inside the house some months earlier. A message scrawled on it translated as "Goodbye, everyone". Because I'd encountered similar, rather inane, polt-jottings before, the note-on-the-note didn't, in itself, induce scepticism. That came later, when I noticed that the *djinni*'s handwriting was quite similar to that of 13-year-old Wan.

Because of the exotic location, because of the overlay of *djinn* folklore, and because fire-starting polts are (thankfully) relatively rare, I found the Zainab case particularly interesting. But as I didn't see objects levitating or appearing out of nowhere, or actually observe fires as they ignited, I simply can't say whether or not the episode was genuinely paranormal. Had it also featured, as many of our Aussie cases have, showers of stones observed by scores of witnesses, it would, of course, have been much easier to come down on one side or the other. By the time I left the house I was, like Syed, wavering between scepticism and belief – and I'm still wavering.

FOR AND AGAINST...

Some aspects of the case strongly suggest the episode was genuinely paranormal:

- Zainab never sought to profit from the episode. It had, in fact, cost her dearly. Many of her possessions were destroyed, and she'd paid the Muslim priests 1,000 Ringgits for their failed exorcism.
- She seemed completely honest, and it would have been virtually impossible for any of the family to start the fires without her noticing. No outsider could have hoaxed them.
- No family member had an obvious motive to hoax the affair.
- Independent witnesses saw objects move and disappear.
- The steady escalation of weirdness – beginning with objects moving and disappearing, progressing to the slashing of clothes, then to the weird message, and finally to the fires – conforms to patterns of polt behaviour noted elsewhere.

PAUL CROPPER

ABOVE: Author Paul Cropper and Wan Nurfatifa, possible focus of the Kota Bharu poltergeist.

I noticed the *djinn*'s writing was similar to that of the 13-year-old Wan

- The very fact that more than 200 fires occurred without at least one of them doing serious damage – or for that matter completely consuming the flimsy dwelling – does seem almost miraculous. Uncannily localised fires have been noted at other polt sites.
- The unusually bright, smokeless character of the flame photographed by Zulhanifa Sidek corresponds remarkably well with what the Koran says about the genesis of the *djinn*. Such a flame would be difficult for an amateur to create.
- The surges in weird activity that occurred when strangers arrived corresponds with known polt behaviour.
- The presence of adolescent girls is sometimes seen as a veritable hallmark of a genuine polt case.
- The *djinni*'s rather pointless message was reminiscent of others found at polt sites.
- After the holy men failed to "cleanse" the house, the rate of fire-starting sharply increased. Similar sudden escalations of activity after attempted exorcisms have been noted at many other polt sites.

On the other hand, a few things suggest the episode was bogus:

- Although none had occurred for 10 days, two fires broke out on the very day I visited. Some might see that as a little too fortuitous.
- The family seemed strangely unexcited by the fires.
- At one stage, so many of the girl's uniforms were damaged that they had to stay home from school. Could that have been a motive for hoaxing?
- Most suspicious of all was the similarity of Wan's handwriting to that on the 10 Ringgit note.

But regardless of whether or not they were genuinely supernatural, the fires I observed at Kota Bharu were the last to occur. The *djinn*, or the hoaxer(s), have called it quits, and Zainab can sleep soundly once again.

While I'm hesitant to declare that the Malaysian episode was truly paranormal, I have fewer doubts about a particularly interesting fire-polt case from our Australian file. Tony Healy tells the story in "Flaming Heck!" on p42. FT

NOTES

1–4. Robert Lebling: *Legends of the Fire Spirits*, pp72–80, 104, 142, 165, 253.

5–7 Stephen Wagner: "All About the Djinn", About.com Guide.

8–10 Wikipedia, quoting Ibn Taymiyyah: "Essays on the Djinn".

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Like their hero, Gully Bull, **PAUL CROPPER** and **TONY HEALY** have investigated all manner of strange phenomena for many years. They co-authored *Out of the Shadows – Mystery Animals of Australia* (1994) and *The Yowie* (2006). In 1998, they witnessed the remarkable Humpty Doo poltergeist episode. Their next book, *Australian Poltergeist*, will be published in early 2012.

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THE GREASE DEVILS

BOB RICKARD reports on a major outbreak of 'mass hysteria' that has terrified the people of Sri Lanka and seen the country divided on socio-economic, racial, religious, linguistic and political lines.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP

ABOVE: Sri Lankan soldiers hold back angry residents who attempted to storm government buildings in Kinniya, eastern Sri Lanka, on 15 August 2011. Protests and riots followed so-called 'grease devil' attacks in many parts of the island, and the police's failure to put an end to them.

This summer, a dangerous mass sociogenic panic broke out in Sri Lanka, of an intensity, significance and extent that exceeds the outbreaks of Monkeyman Mania in northern India in 2001 [**FT148:8–9, 149:7**]. Rumours spread quickly among the minority communities in the island's war-torn regions about nocturnal prowlers who attack women, slashing their breasts and sometimes strangling them or stealing their underwear. Largely, in true fortean tradition, the 'grease devils' (or *grease yakas* in Sinhalese) have proved uncatchable while, at the same time, vigilantes were chasing and killing unfortunates found in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Rumours spread about nocturnal prowlers who attack women

As far as we can tell, the first news-reported cases appeared in early August and hint at a prior mythology about 'grease devils'. It was said, simply, that women in Dodamgolla and Ambagolla were afraid to go out after 6pm because of lurkers "peeping into homes" and we see the term *yakas* used for the first time in this context. Police promptly arrested seven local youths from these villages who had been drinking and "roaming the streets". Within several days, there was a rumour that seven older women had been killed on the Opatha housing estate at Kahawatte. A police spokesman, SP Prishantha Jayakody, tried to calm fears by declaring: "All grease devils and other suspects are in custody. No more grease *yakas* roam the country now." The incidents, he added confidently, were down to local nuisances and feuds. "Recently some women had caught some 'supernatural forces' and 'grease devils' and found that they were from their own neighbourhood. Some women admitted that the persons who attacked them were not grease *yakas* but their own husbands who were under the influence of liquor," he declared. "They had lied to the police to prevent their husbands from getting arrested."

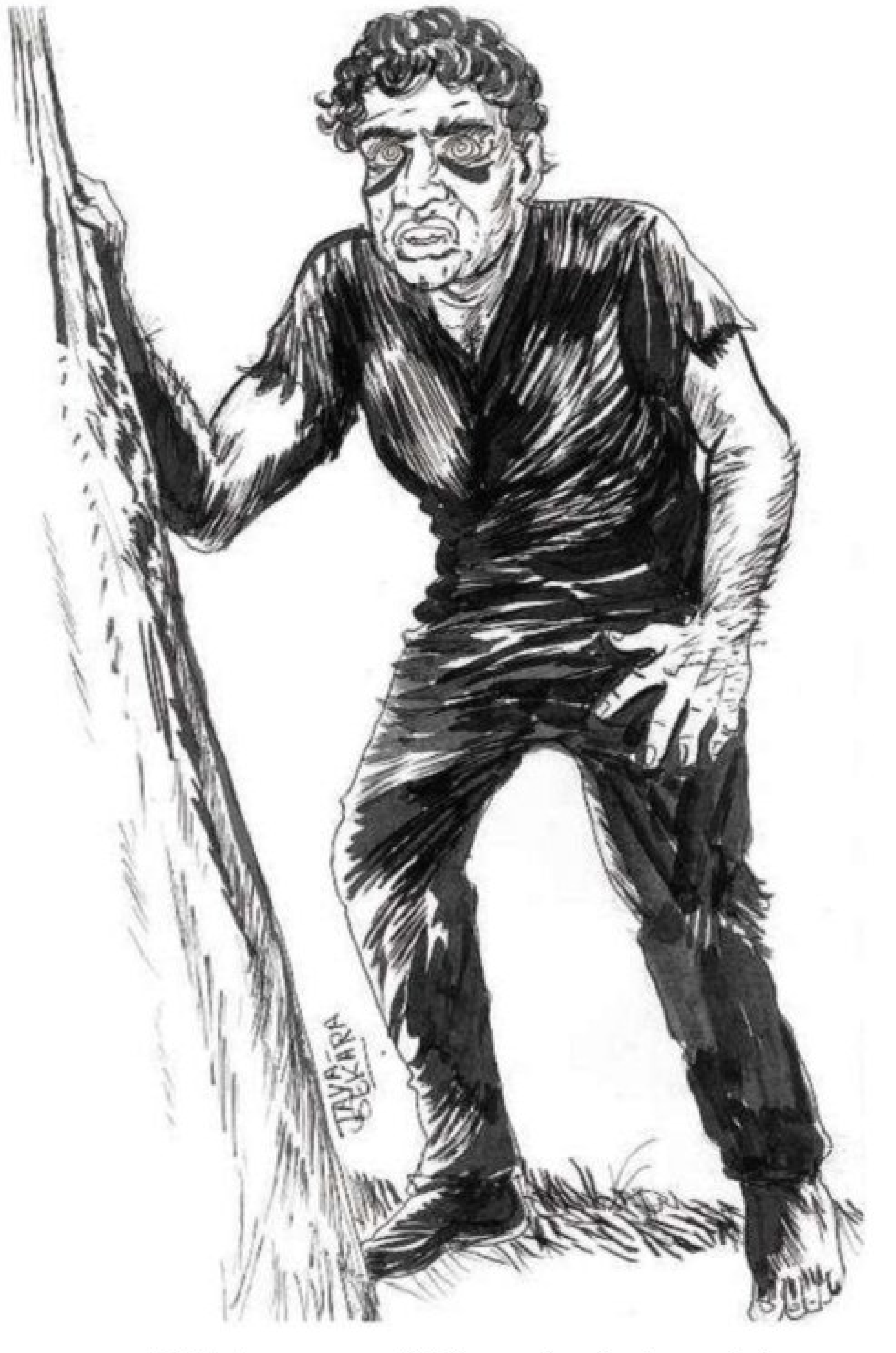
Within a week, that was clearly not the case. Four policemen were injured during a riot at Ottamavedi when a mob tried to 'arrest' a suspected *yaka* (he was later exonerated); in the Wellamboda district of Kandy, as a group chased another 'suspect', one of the pursuers was fatally electrocuted on the live tripwire of a boar trap; and on a tea estate at Haputale two local boys, who were dressed in black and on a motorbike, were hacked to death after some female tea-pickers complained the boys were “intimidating” them. In a similar incident – which may have been separate or a variant story, it’s not clear – *six* youths “dressed in black”, who had been pestering females on a tea estate at Badulla, were chased and caught by workers who “thrashed” them before handing them to police. Some girls said they had been made to kneel while the boys “performed a devil dance”.

Police investigated a further 21 reports from 13 other villages of “criminals” posing as *yakas* “frightening and threatening people” with intent to rob or molest. In at least three of these cases, the person apprehended was innocent, and at one village a group of seven men on a business trip was beaten up by residents suspicious of strangers. Other suspects turned out to be “sexually frustrated or mentally disabled persons”, said the Uva province’s senior policeman, Detective Inspector General Pujith Jayasundere. He also knew of residents who had been frightened off their land by pretend *yakas* mining for gems or logging trees. At the same time, back in Kahawatte, it was announced that three men had been arrested, charged with the murder of “several elderly women”.

By mid-month, across the centre and eastern parts of rural Sri Lanka, most women chose to stay indoors. “There is a prevailing sense of fear,” said Sepali Kottegoda of the Women and Media Collective. As local police seemed to be having difficulty in finding the culprits, groups of neighbours were arming themselves. The police issued a major warning to the public to desist from calling every robbery or nuisance a *yaka* attack and from ‘punishing’ their own suspects. The flap continued to escalate, so a regional Special Task Force was ordered by DIG Jayasundere.

In Hindu tradition, one news article explained, a grease devil was “a thief who wore only underwear and covered his body in grease to evade capture”. In this new manifestation, some reports were describing a combination of sexual molester and vampire. One woman told a Reuters reporter that they “bite the necks and breasts of young women”. She also referred to a growing feeling among ordinary folk that the police did not bring “effective action against these grease devils”.

It got worse. At Ottamavadi, six people including two police officers were injured in a fracas at a police station when a ‘suspect’ was released. At Thirukkovil, police had to use tear gas to disperse a mob demanding that two ‘grease devils’ be handed over to them. At Pottuvil on the east coast, a police station was besieged by a mob demanding that four ‘suspects’ be handed over for lynching; the clash lasted several days and left one dead (a Muslim member of Congress) and several injured. A curfew enforced by the military was ordered. At Urani, the ‘suspects’ turned out to be officials conducting a survey of feral elephants in the jungle. A farmer later told a reporter of the local doubts about this: “What were wildlife officers doing on the top of trees in the middle of the night, with black masks on?” Elsewhere, drug traffickers and illegal dynamite fishing were blamed.



ABOVE: A newspaper artist’s impression of a grease devil.

Local activists were quick to point out or exploit the observation that the attacks were taking place among the poorer ethnic rural communities, both Tamil and Muslim. Often poorly educated with a credulous reliance upon religion and folklore to solve most problems – and, it was clear, still suffering from a legacy of unresolved anxiety and insecurity from the civil war against the Tamil Tiger secessionists that ended in May 2009 – the communities were only too ready to believe that they were under attack by supernatural entities.

Those who sought a more ‘rational’ explanation for the elusiveness of the *yakas* asserted that the devils were being protected by factions within the police and government. (We saw similar propositions in Britain and America 20–25 years ago to account for the lack of evidence of child-sacrificing Satanic cults.) These fears soon mutated into outright accusations that the Sinhalese government was using the police and military in a psychological war against Muslims and Tamils, demoralising them with these frightening random assaults. It didn’t help matters when police fired live rounds into angry crowds to disperse them.

Several reporters noted that Sri Lanka was a very angry place, with rising crime figures, food costs and unemployment, and ready at the slightest excuse to explode into violence. Several months back, there had been a well–publicised and unsolved series of murders of beggars. At the height of the current uproar, a bus driver in Kantalai killed a schoolboy and injured others. The community – fed up with reckless bus drivers flouting traffic laws and with apparent immunity from the police and courts – exercised their own justice and attacked several buses. The devil flap had by now also infected the public imagination and political vocabulary as cartoons lampooning politicians as *yakas* were angrily rebutted when their targets in turn accused their own opponents of complicity in the ‘conspiracy’. The chief opposition United National Party (UNP) openly blamed the police for failing to stop the “*yaka* phenomenon”. Their spokesman, Kabir Hashim, told reporters: “The issue may have begun as a joke but now it has grown dangerous and must be stopped.” School exams and the Muslims’ holy Ramadan month have been disrupted, he added.

As vigilante activities continued, so did the toll of deaths and injuries; yet reportage of actual cases of the violation of local women – the *root cause* of the general unrest – was noticeably sparse and generally implicated some local opportunist criminal, pervert, or ‘undesirable’ – if not an entirely innocent victim. A bungled ring robbery in Batticaloa and a woman attacked in her kitchen in Muttur were two of the prominent examples; in both cases mobs burned down a police checkpoint in protest over the lack of arrests.

However, a few frightening experiences were reported. On 10 August, Aashika, 22, stepped outside to fetch water from a tap by the side of the house in Pottuvil. Suddenly, she told the *Sunday Leader*, she was lifted by her underarms onto the roof. “She struggled and tried to scream but started feeling faint and could not utter a sound. Dragged [across] the roof, she [bit] down hard on her attacker's thumb, causing him to release her and [she fell to the ground]." The commotion brought her family outside to investigate and her brother-in-law "shone his torch and managed to see a fleeing figure dressed in black". Aashika thought there were two assailants; one was holding her and another holding him as he leaned down from the roof. "She says she felt a polythene-like substance covering his arms, and tasted something bitter when she bit down on his finger." On her face was "some white chemical residue which she says caused her to feel faint" and she had deep scratches on her breasts. She spent two days in hospital before returning home. In another case – location not reported – a 30-year-old mother and her children began sleeping at her sister's house next door, but returned home to cook. On this occasion, her assailant was waiting by an open window. He grabbed her, she said, nearly strangled her with her shawl and passed her outside to an accomplice on the roof. As she felt herself lifted up, she flung her oil lamp at the man's face, which caught fire as the kerosene splashed him, after which both figures fled.

Understandably, victims and their families and neighbours were frightened and frustrated, but there was very little for the police to go on. Both women spoke of the way their attackers "jumped about" and "ran fast" and communicated with signs or signals; and at least one report compared the panic to the Spring-heeled Jack case in 19th-century London. These were not the only aspects that baffled local police. "The victims' statements are dubious and full of holes," protested Chief Inspector Wasantha Kumara of the Pottuvil Police. "One victim claimed to have been lifted by the shawl some 8ft [2.4m] off the ground; this is usually enough to strangle a normal person. The cuts on their arms are also strange. They are more likely to have been caused by dragging a safety pin across the skin than anything else," he claimed, adding that without clear descriptions no arrests could be made.

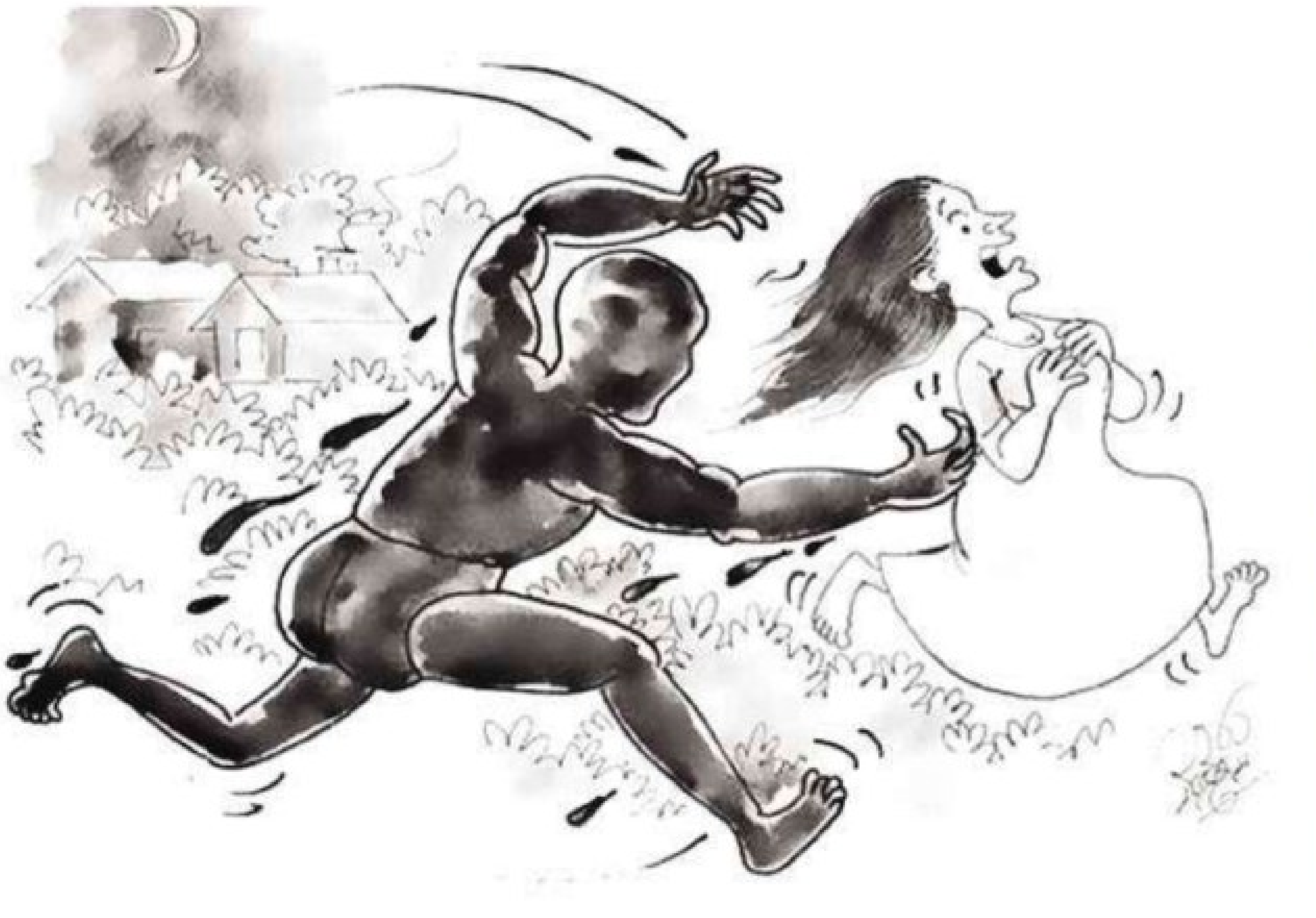
She bit down hard on her attacker's thumb, making him release her

CHARLES HAVILAND

ABOVE: Puttalam resident Mrs Faris imitates the loping gait of the grease devil intruder.

As the finger-pointing and accusations flew between different political factions and organisations, the public mood entrenched. The idea of a corrupt but bungling police force did not seem sinister enough and so popular suspicions turned towards the island's military, which had already gained a reputation for secrecy and brutality during (and since) the civil war. Another report asserted firmly that: "These attacks are real, and perpetrated by extremely athletic individuals who carry out detailed reconnaissance prior to making their move. If not covered in grease, some form of slippery clothing is used." This focus of great resources and skills upon such relatively local crimes 'proved' – according to some reader comments on newspaper websites – that the devils are "trained stealth personnel with a military background" and "using nerve chemicals". Their purpose, the claims continued, was to create a climate of fear among the rural Tamil and Muslim communities which will be used by the oppressive government as cover to set up military camps across the country. Perhaps, mused one reporter, this fear was a recollection of stories of the so-called 'ninja death squads' allegedly used in Indonesia to subdue the East Timorese independence movement.

At Urady, where a crowd roughed up military officers, the Army retaliated with batons and arrests. At Pakiawatte, mass panic arose when a uniform was found in an abandoned house. After the attack on Aashika at Pottuvil, an Army patrol drafted in to guard the housing estate was set upon, leading to more bloodshed and arrests. At Urany, a man on the back of a friend's motorbike, returning from attending his wife's childbirth, was ambushed by two military jeeps. "I was beaten up mercilessly and they held a knife to my neck," he told a reporter, pointing at the fresh wound across his throat. Neighbours stormed the police station demanding the two men, and five others, be released. Fearing the riot would get worse, provincial councillor Abdul Majeed intervened, releasing the detainees to the crowd, which then chanted for the military to leave Pottuvil altogether. This was possibly the worst moment the Army could have chosen to step in and disperse the angry townsfolk. The councillor described hearing shots, seeing individuals being beaten by several soldiers. Calling out for them to stop, he saw an officer turn and fire in his direction and one of his



TOP LEFT: One of a number of newspaper cartoons showing a grease devil. **TOP RIGHT:** A masked man arrested in the Sigirya-Dambulla area of Sri Lanka after terrorising residents. His bag was found to be loaded with women's unwashed underwear.

constituents standing beside him, who had come to report a missing nephew, fell dead. At the inquest a few days later, a lawyer for the dead man spoke in dismay of the number of witnesses refusing to testify for fear of retaliation by the Army.

For its part, the Army was unapologetic and intractable. Requesting anonymity, a senior Army officer told the *Sunday Leader* that *yaka* attacks "were a figment of the public imagination" and that the women who reported attacks were "either divorced, widows, or prostitutes". He also vigorously denied that the Army had done *any* shooting, blaming "dormant LTTE aggravators with illegal weapons" (the LTTE being the defeated but not eradicated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). Internet chat rooms and news agency comment pages reacted angrily, arguing that the military, the police and "the Sinhala media" were all under the control of the government, who were turning the island "into another Burma".

The outbreaks of vigilante violence and official retaliation continued towards the end of August. Hundreds were arrested and the anxiety got more surreal. On the 12th, an excitable outfit called Lanka-e-news reported a popular belief that the *yakas* were seeking blood from "14 infant milk-feeding mothers" to make a sacrifice for the success of their search for ancient symbols of power. The devils, it was claimed, were behind excavations in the earthworks and dams at Rajarata made by King Dutugemunu (a 2nd-century BC Sinhalese Buddhist king of Sri Lanka, who overthrew the regime of Tamil Hindu invaders). According to legend, whoever holds Dutugemunu's sword, gold chain or golden bed will regain rule over the island. A critical analysis of the whole grease devil saga on *Groundviews* (21 August) – the 'citizen journalism' website of the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo – noted that within a week, the rumour recorded in Colombo suburbs was that 50,000 mothers were to be abducted. "Most now talk of night stalkers who come wearing [sharp] 'white iron' finger nails, that make scratching of female breasts easy, to collect blood. Again, the blood is said to be for a ritual that would release President Rajapaksa from a very bad astrological influence."

Kusal Perera, also writing on *Groundviews*, reviewed the investigation into the "pre-event" at Kahawatte. It turns out that the murders of old ladies had been happening for at least a year and, most reports agreed, were quite unrelated to what followed. The notorious serial killer, who had evaded police for some time, was finally apprehended on 7 July (not in August). He was an Army deserter and confessed only to two killings. The next day (the 8th), *a second* Army deserter was arrested in the same town for a different murder of an elderly woman, and gave his alias as *Bhoothaya* (Sinhalese for ghost or demon). This odd coincidence and bizarre name, writes Perera, was exploited through May and June by local papers, which featured stories of alarmed villages "frozen with fear" and busy with rituals begging gods to protect their homes from ghosts. It was at the time of those arrests that residents of the Opatha housing estate demonstrated against police failure to catch the murderers, bringing the Army in to patrol the estate in response.

Other significant factors in the grease *yaka* flap were aired on *Groundviews*, chiefly that the panics had developed mostly in poor Muslim areas and less so in Sinhala and Tamil communities; yet the public order authorities were mostly blaming "the Tamil Diaspora", often referred to in their reports as "the rump of the LTTE". At the same time, the news agencies of the Tamil Diaspora were repeatedly reporting that the *yakas* were heard to be speaking Sinhalese. One Indian paper, the *Weekend Leader*, interviewed Seeman, the head of the Naam Thamilar Party, who warned that the current government was conducting a programme "of Sinhalisation of Tamil areas" and that "a separate country for Tamils is the only practical solution to the never-ending miseries of the Sri Lankan Tamils".

As August closed, a young police officer on traffic duty in Puttalam was killed by a mob wielding swords and clubs. Two "outsiders" were lynched in the central highlands; and a 16-year-old boy was shot for "suspicious behaviour". In Jaffna, in the north, more than 100 people were arrested for "vigilantism" and some were allegedly so badly beaten they were hospitalised. TamilNet, one of the Diaspora voices, continued to broadcast bizarre stories; that the "genocidal military transform themselves into grease devils at night", smothered in grease and carrying "a small kris-knife"; and that they are abducting "mental patients" to leave at the scenes of their crimes to be caught. It is difficult to see how this will be resolved when there is no agreement even on the identity of the grease devils. **FT**

With thanks to Brian Chapman for his research into the original Sri Lankan news sources and Dushi Yanthini Kanagasabapathipillai for supplying the cartoons.

SOURCES

(All Sri Lankan publications, unless otherwise stated.)

D.Mirror, 2+11+13+20+22+23+24+25+26 Aug, 2+5 Sept; D.News, 5 Aug; Sunday Times, 11+14+28 Aug, 1 Sept; [R] 12+21 Aug; Lanka-e-News, 12 Aug, 12 Sept; Sunday Leader; Sunday Observer, 20 Aug; The Nation; Sunday Divayina, 21 Aug; Groundviews, 21+24+25 Aug, 8 Sept; The Island, 22 Aug; Guardian (UK), 23 Aug; Colombo Page; Asian Tribune (Sweden), 24 Aug; Weekend Leader (India) 26 Aug; BBC News (UK) 28+29 Aug; Lanka Newspapers, 30 Aug; TamilNet, 2+8+9 Sept; Sri Lanka Guardian, 5 Sept 2011.

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HAVE YOUR SAY

forum

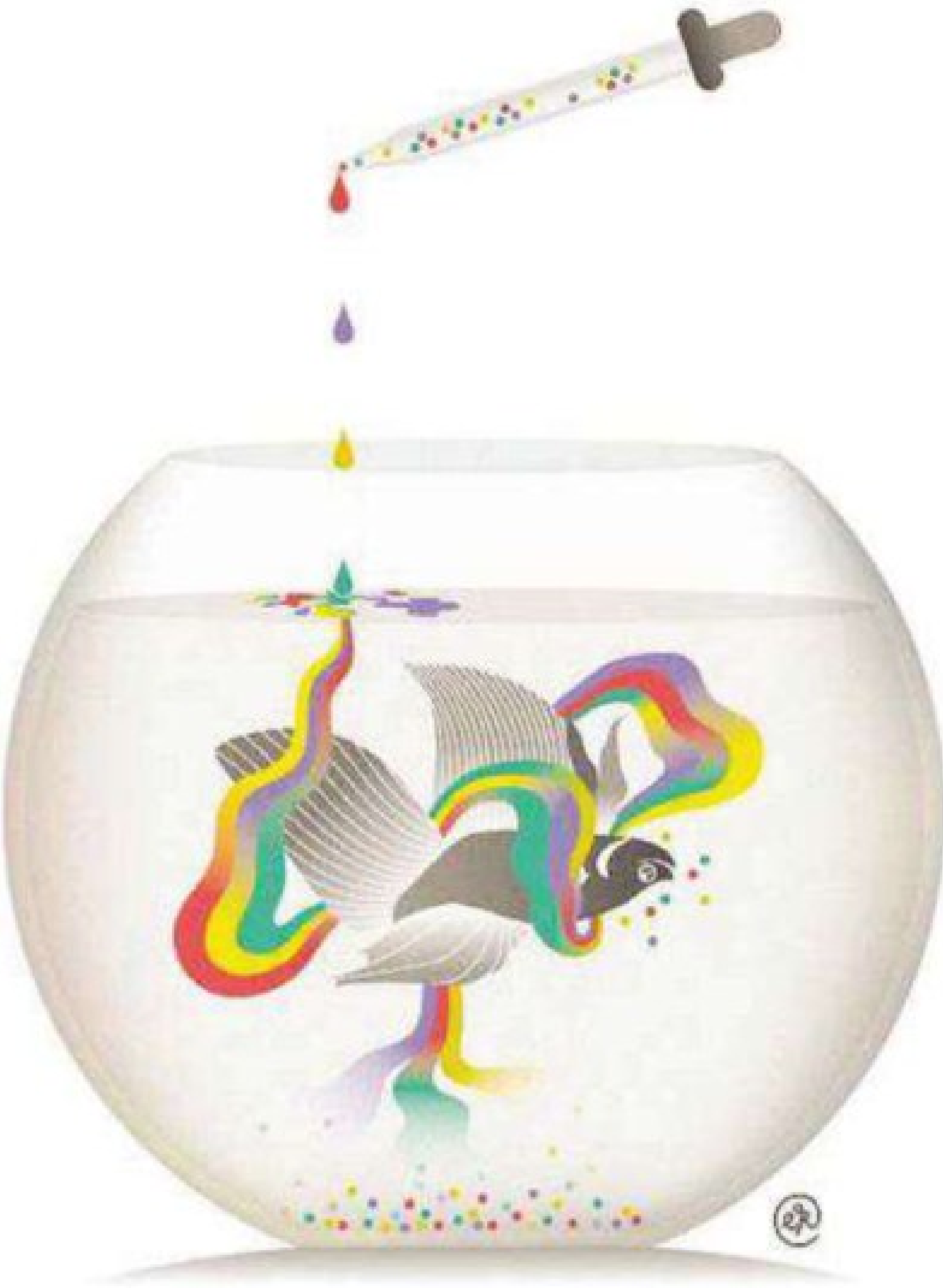
Gone on a fishing trip

IAN SIMMONS finds a bizarre real-life analogue of the popular LSD-in-the-water-supply urban legend. But it's a fishy tale...

IAN SIMMONS is a long-time *Fortean Times* contributor and freelance editor. He lives in Newcastle and works in science communication.

While Andy Roberts (**FT262:38–42**) and David Hambling (**FT266:55**) might not have turned up anyone who was definitely planning to dump LSD in the water supply to cause mass hallucinations, one researcher was very definitely aiming to do just that, in 1964, but the intended recipients were fish, not people.

Recently, the ever-useful blog at boingboing.net pointed me to an article in the online archives of *Sport Illustrated* (http://bit.ly/bSRAGq), entitled "A Dreamy New Era for Fish", from its 30 March 1964 edition. The piece enthusiastically outlined the fisheries research of Howard Loeb, then senior aquatic biologist at the New York State Conservation Department Fish Laboratory. Loeb was an ex-paratrooper with a taste for working on "the fun stuff – the thing that nobody knows anything about", whose previous research into fish management techniques had attracted the attention of Dr Harold A Abramson, Director of Psychiatric Research at South Oaks Psychiatric Hospital in Amityville, New York State, who had been investigating LSD's potential in psychiatry. He was attempting to use it to induce artificial schizophrenia, in order to create controlled conditions under which anti-schizophrenic drugs could be tested. To do this, he started by dosing Siamese fighting fish, as they seem to be as sensitive to LSD as humans and were easy to work with. When he did so, though, the fish floated to the surface in a stupor and remained that way for several hours, before recovering with no apparent ill effects. He discussed this with Loeb, who found this effect very interesting – he'd been trying to find ways of removing "trash fish" like carp from fishing lakes without damaging the more valued fish. But nothing he'd found had been totally successful; compounds like Rotenone, the most popular aquatic pesticide at the time, either killed all the fish and lingered for ages, preventing restocking, or failed to deal with all the carp, whose populations quickly bounced back. If LSD had the same effect on wild fish that it had on Siamese fighting fish, he conjectured, you could simply dose a pond, all the stoned fish would float to the surface, the unwanted ones could then be scooped out and the rest left to recover unharmed. You could also use the same method to survey fish numbers: dose the fish, let them float up, take an aerial photograph and count them from that.



EMMANUEL ROMEUF

At the time of the article, Loeb had been working with the chemical company Eli Lilly to test over 40 different LSD analogues on carp, goldfish, golden and common shiners, blacknose dace, yellow perch, pumpkinseed sunfish, white suckers, bullheads, brook trout and brown trout. He found that the fish popped up to the top of the water, swam backwards, often went into a stupor, and that under the influence of LSD carp became noticeably lighter in colour. He also discovered that when fish were moved to a tank of fresh water, affected fish remained stoned for several hours, then became darker in colour and started to come round; but if left in the original test tank, the fish only recovered after several days. Interestingly, Loeb also found that he could tell if test water still contained active LSD by putting it under ultraviolet light. If it did, it appeared blue.

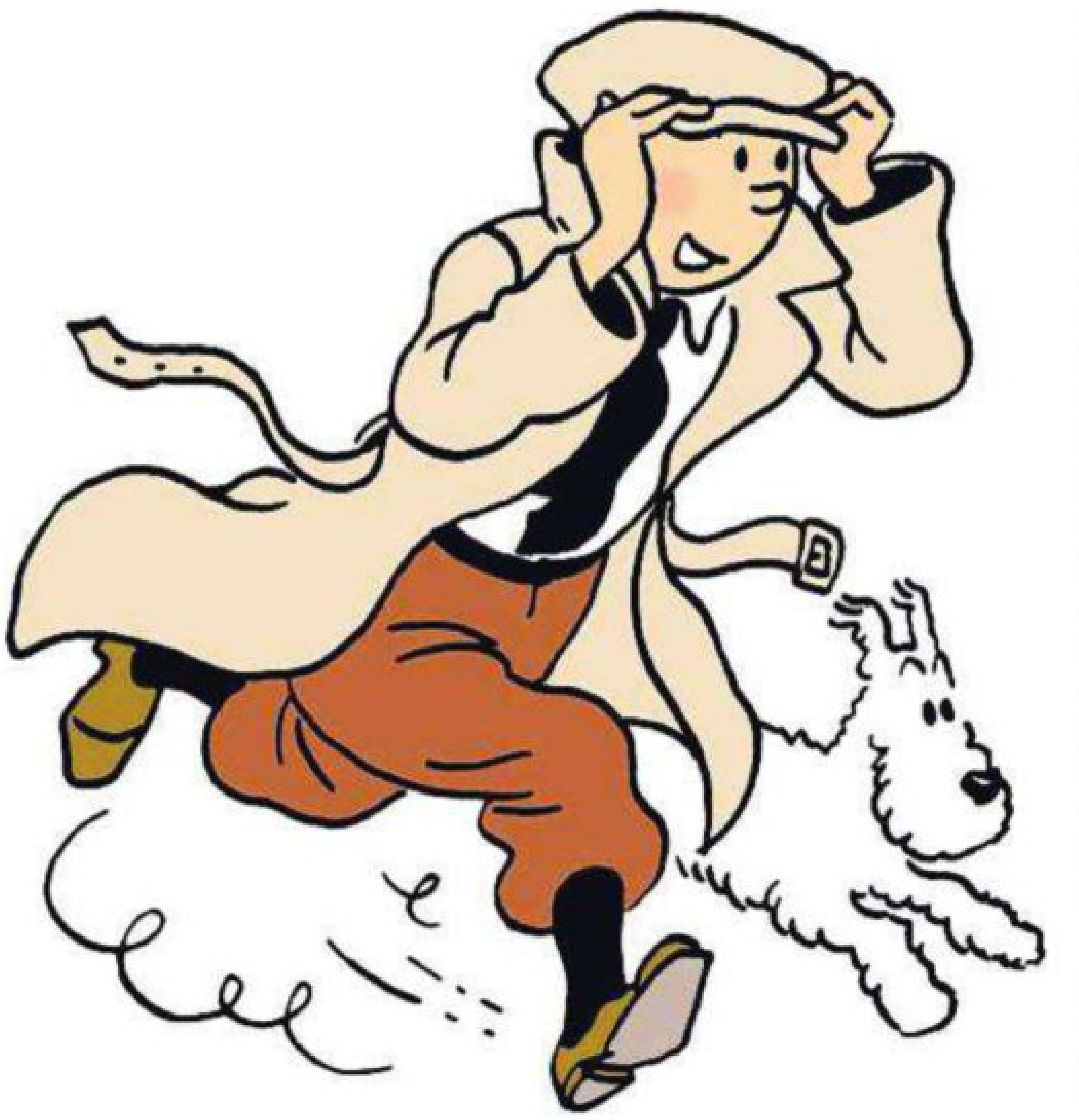
The article goes on to point out that "It is now impossible to use any of the compounds in the field, because no one knows what would happen to a person who happened to swim in or drink from a treated pond or lake. But the tests are most encouraging and the possibilities unlimited, both for sport and commercial fishing." Loeb, though, had bigger plans: "What I actually envision is the chemical harvesting of commercial fish," he said. "I can see the day when you back your freezer truck up to the dock and the fish just march right out of the water and fillet themselves."

Sports Illustrated remains a hugely popular US Magazine (it's currently read by an estimated 23 million people a week), and, if anything, its circulation and influence were even greater in 1964. Back then, though, LSD did not have the kind of prominence in mainstream media it would achieve in the next few years, so it's likely that for a lot of *Sports Illustrated*'s audience – for the most part conservative family men – this would have been one of the first times that they had come across any significant mention of the drug, and it was in the context of dumping it in large bodies of water. Cops were unlikely to have read the positive countercultural accounts of LSD use, but they would most likely have read conservative media scare stories about the drug... and sports magazines. Put the former together with a half-remembered fishing tale from the latter, and Yippie provocations may well have appeared a lot more credible than they were ever meant to. FT

The Fortean Adventures of Tintin

Hergé's *Adventures of Tintin* series has proved a publishing phenomenon, with over 350 million copies of the original albums sold in 80 languages. With the new big-budget Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson movie imminent, **TOM HEYWOOD** looks at some of the fortean themes in the books.

TOM HEYWOOD runs a management consultancy and has a long term interest in all things fortean. He is especially keen on disparate interpretations of single events.



Hergé's *The Adventures of Tintin* consists of 24 'albums' written and drawn by Belgian cartoonist Georges Remi (1907–1983; he transposed his initials to arrive at the now famous name of 'Hergé'). They feature the 'boy reporter' Tintin (first introduced in a 1929 strip-cartoon in *Le Petit Vingtième*) in a range of exciting adventures, often accompanied by his friends Captain Haddock and the eccentric Professor Calculus, as well as his faithful dog Snowy.

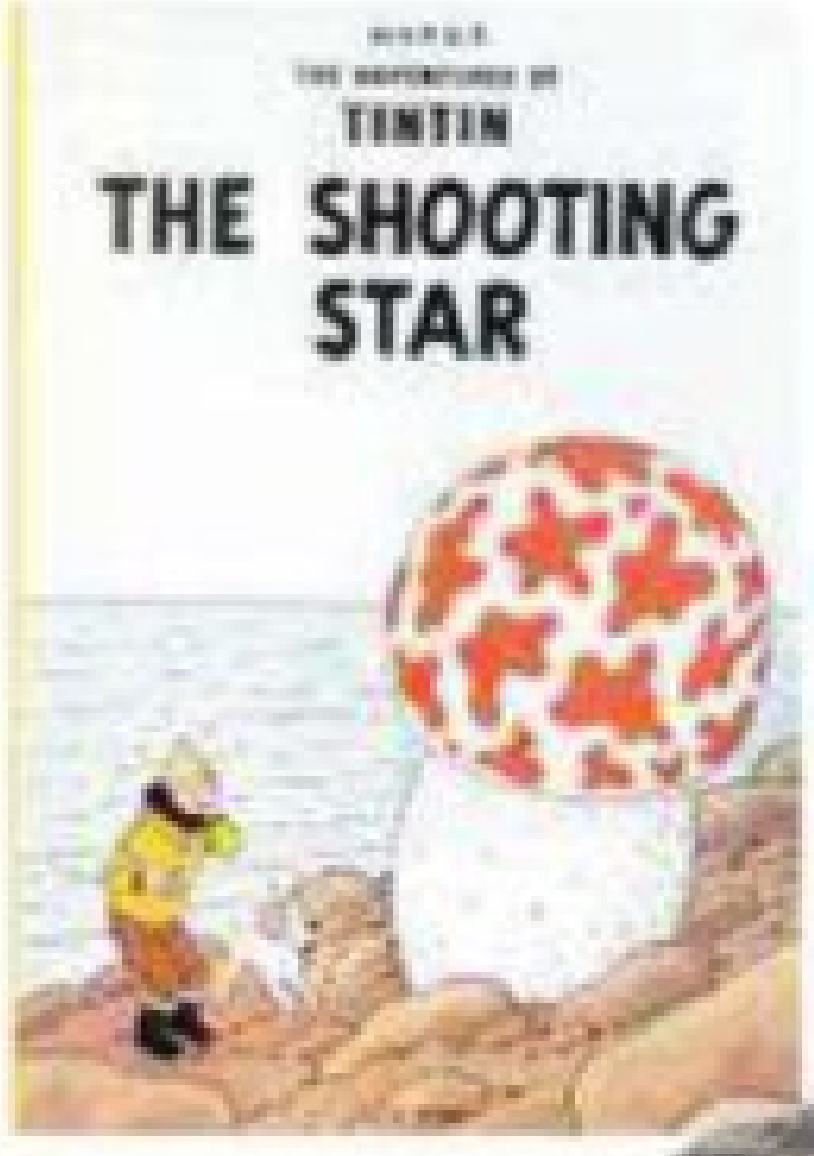
The books have been substantially analysed and deconstructed, especially in Europe where the art of graphic novels (or, more accurately, 'la bande dessinée') is a subject for serious study. What hasn't been so well explored is Hergé's use of fortean themes in his work.

Hergé was a voracious collector of pictures, articles and ideas, which he put to use in the Tintin series (he would have made a perfect *FT* 'clipster'). The backgrounds in Tintin are famously detailed and 'realistic', drawn in Hergé's celebrated *ligne claire* style. To aid him in creating this richly imagined world, Hergé would collect vast amounts of published material to use as sources, and obtained much of his fortean inspiration from this large archive.

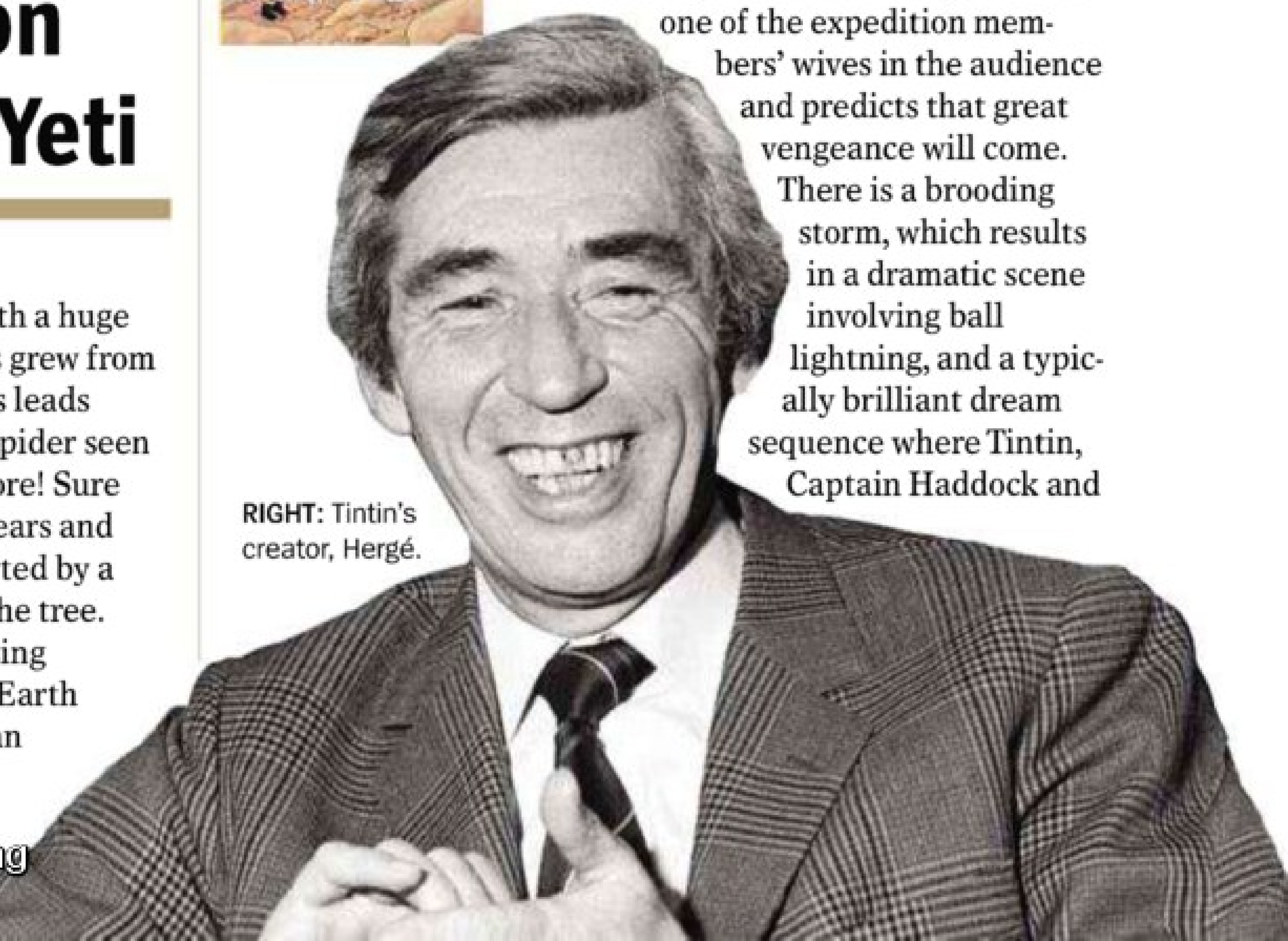
An early, classic example is *The Shooting Star* (1942), an exciting, chase-based adventure in which a vast meteor threatens the very existence of Earth. As it approaches, rats stream through the city streets and a prophet of doom intones: "Judgment is upon us, the end of the world is at hand." In the event, the meteor misses the Earth, except for one small chunk which lands in the Arctic Ocean and forms an island on which a new element in the meteor somehow makes everything grow to a huge size: first, giant mushrooms appear, then a fast-growing apple tree from a core which Tintin discards when he finds a maggot in it. He then has a brush with a huge insect, which he conjectures grew from the maggot in his apple. This leads him to worry about a small spider seen in his lunch box the day before! Sure enough, the vast spider appears and chases him, only to be thwarted by a massive apple falling from the tree.

Heuvelmans supplied Hergé with information about the Yeti

The idea of a meteor causing catastrophic damage to the Earth is a common theme in fortean literature and science fiction. Hergé may well have been influenced by news of a specific meteor, of which there were a number observed in the 1930s. Additionally, Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* – with its story of a cylindrical alien 'meteor' landing in New Jersey (HG Wells's original had the landing near London) – had been broadcast in 1938, possibly exerting another influence. More poetically, the meteor could be seen as a symbol for the onset of World War II in Europe, as the book was written in late 1941, in a Belgium where the war's impact was all too apparent.



The Seven Crystal Balls/ Prisoners Of The Sun (1948/1949) is a two-volume tale heavy with fortean themes and a superbly dark atmosphere. A Western expedition has broken into an Inca tomb in Peru and brought back to Europe a mummy and other artefacts. One by one, the expedition members are struck down by a mysterious coma, each one found with fragments of crystal next to him. Hergé brilliantly foreshadows this with a mystic act in a music hall performance who picks out one of the expedition members' wives in the audience and predicts that great vengeance will come. There is a brooding storm, which results in a dramatic scene involving ball lightning, and a typically brilliant dream sequence where Tintin, Captain Haddock and



RIGHT: Tintin's creator, Hergé.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP

Professor Calculus have the same macabre vision: the mummy Rascar Capac coming through their bedroom window and smashing a crystal ball. It is a genuinely unnerving scene – as is the one in the hospital in which the expedition members go into seizures at exactly the same time each day.

The second part takes place in South America itself, where Tintin uncovers a modern day Inca tribe still alive and well. For this album, Hergé seems to have used as a major reference Charles Wiener's 1880 book *Perou et Bolivie* (Wiener had himself been on a South American expedition), and Hergé faithfully reproduces temples, mummies, pottery and clothing, as well as evoking a strong sense of atmosphere through his Andean landscapes. Intriguingly, Hergé's modern-day Incas seem to have lost their knowledge of celestial bodies, as Tintin appears to 'control' the Sun by knowing the time of an eclipse, and our heroes are thus saved from a sacrificial death. The Incas, nevertheless, are depicted with dignity and their desire to keep their existence secret is respected.

Regarded by many as Hergé's greatest work, *Tintin In Tibet* (1960) was famously written at a time of personal turmoil for its author when his nights were tortured by dreams of white, punctuated by tunnels and imprisoning bars. Out of this personal angst came a beautiful and unusual album: there are no villains and no violence in *Tibet*. Instead, Tintin must search for a long-lost friend who has apparently died in an air crash in the Himalayas. It is an extraordinary book about sacrifice, friendship and perseverance – the most overtly emotional of the albums, and wonderfully illustrated.

The fortean themes in *Tibet* are essentially spiritual, as befits a profoundly symbolic work. The most obvious element is the treatment of the Yeti himself. Long before he is seen, Hergé's Yeti is talked about in reverential tones by the book's Sherpas, and then a set of clear tracks is discovered in the snow. Hergé was clearly influenced by the popularity of Yeti 'sightings' in the late-1950s: newspaper articles were written about the creature, and photos of the supposed tracks appeared, including one in an edition of *Paris Match* magazine which is in Hergé's archive and which he must have used as a source of the tracks on the book's famous cover. But perhaps Hergé's greatest asset in preparing this album was his friendship with Bernard Heuvelmans, well known to forteans as the 'father of cryptozoology' and author of (among others) *On the Track of Unknown Animals*. Heuvelmans supplied Hergé with copious amounts of documentation about Yeti sightings. Indeed, at the 2011 Conference of European Cryptozoologists, Catherine Gravet gave a presentation on Heuvelmans's influence on Hergé (Loren Coleman summarises some of this work at http://bit.ly/mShLeB (cryptomundo.com)). Hergé also met Maurice Herzog, who had seen what he claimed were Yeti tracks in the Himalayas. Herzog's book *Annapurna* (1951) may well have been an influence on *Tibet*, enthusing as it does about the need to meet life's challenges and seeing the mountain climb as symbolic of personal achievement.

Even when depicting a possibly 'fictional' creature, Hergé was determined to provide a form of realism: "With all this information," as he put it, "I was able to avoid the pitfalls of the legend." Hergé's Yeti is sympathetically rendered: indeed, it is he, it turns out, who has rescued Tintin's friend Chang from the crash and kept him alive.

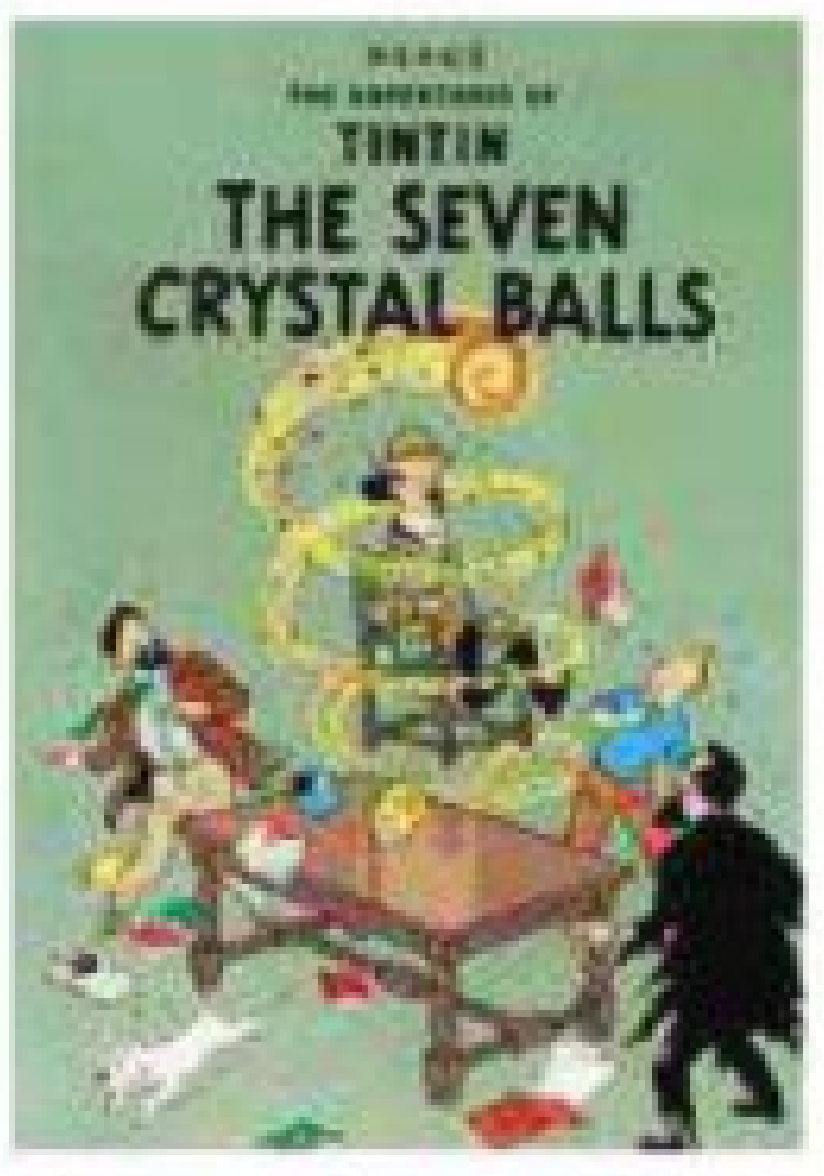
Other fortean themes appear in the book. One of the local monks levitates and 'sees' images of Tintin's friend, still alive, in the presence of the 'Migou' (Yeti). Hergé was inspired by a number of writers on this theme, especially Alexandra David-Neel and Fosco Maraini.

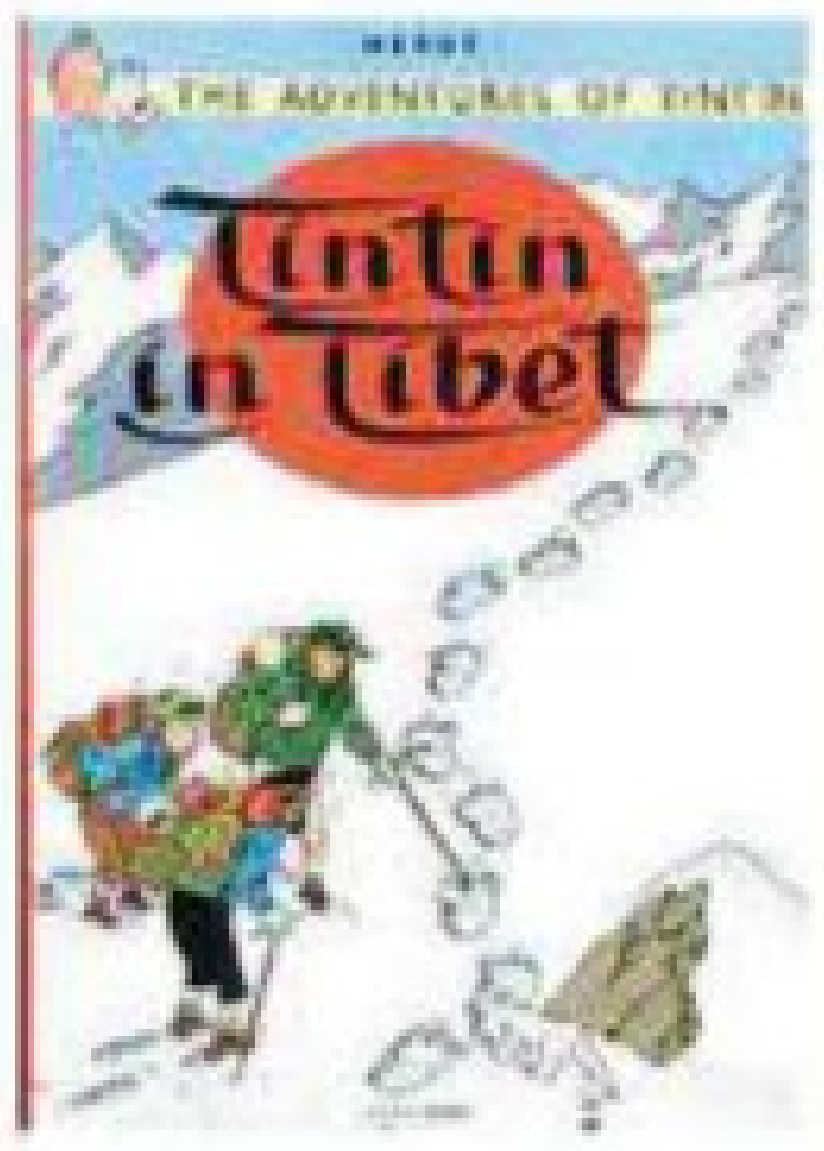
Flight 714 (1968) is the penultimate (completed) Tintin album. In this work, 'paranormal' and science fiction-style themes are more to the fore than in any other. The story takes place on an Indonesian island where Tintin and Captain Haddock have been taken captive as part of a plan to extort funds from a millionaire. The island has an active volcano, which erupts as the story unfolds and as our heroes try to make their escape from their captors. Tintin starts to receive strange directions in his head, as if from a disembodied voice, which lead him to a hidden cave entrance and thence deep into the volcano itself. Here, they come across the strange Mik Kanrokitoff, a writer for a science magazine. The character was based on Jacques Bergier, co-author of the occult classic *Les Matin des Magiciens* (see **FT277:55**) and actively interested in the search for extraterrestrial life. In *Flight 714*, Kanrokitoff has an earpiece through which, he reveals, he has been sending the mysterious messages to Tintin; what's more, this technology has been gained from alien contact. In a reference to Bergier's book, he points to an old carving in a wall which seems to show a picture of a spaceship of some sort, hinting at the presence of 'ancient astronauts'. Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods?* (also heavily influenced by Bergier's work) was published in the same year as *Flight 714*. Hergé was clearly in tune with emerging cult theories in the field of ufology.

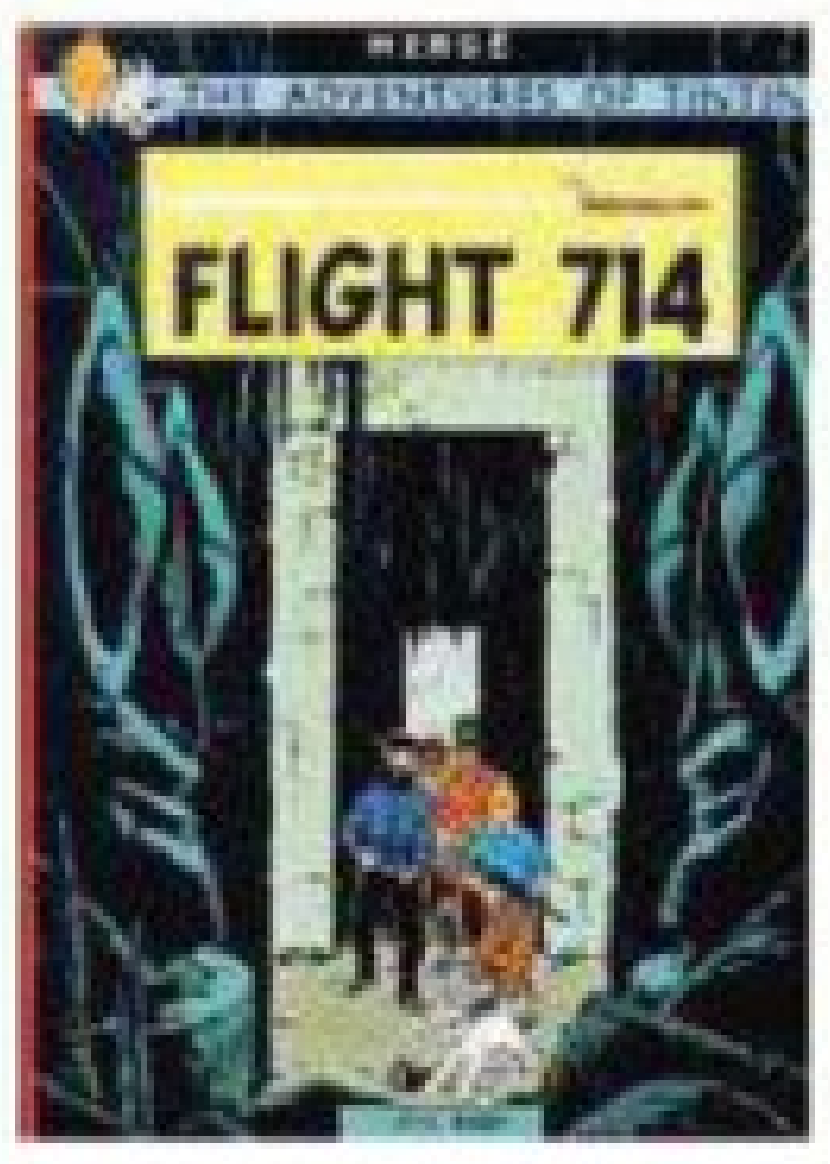
Kanrokitoff hypnotises the group as he is leading them off the erupting island and summons a UFO to whisk them away. Afterwards, in a classic 'missing time' scenario, no one can recall the trip on the UFO (except for Tintin's dog Snowy, whose wise thoughts and witty internal dialogue are probably worthy of their own *FT* article!). Professor Calculus, though, is left with an alloy rod which contains a substance not found on Earth. Hergé – perhaps wisely – refuses to show the aliens piloting the craft, instead leaving this to the reader's imagination.

There are too many other fortean references in the albums to mention them all here. Highlights include an ultrasonic device apparently able to destroy buildings (*The Calculus Affair*, 1956) and a hypnotising fakir and a secret society (*Cigars of the Pharaoh*, 1934). The two-part Moon adventure (*Destination Moon*, 1953 / *Explorers on the Moon*, 1954) is theoretically rich in forteana, but is in fact so prescient of the actual later Moon missions that one reaches to check the publication date, so brilliantly detailed and in many ways accurate is its depiction. And, of course, we must mention Professor Calculus's misplaced reliance on a form of dowsing, which seems largely to lead him up a succession of blind alleys.

When I first read the Tintin albums as a child, I was struck powerfully by the dramatic imagery I have described. Just imagine the excitement – in an age before home computers and video games – of opening a new Tintin book and travelling across China, Africa, the Americas and outer space; of being confronted with living Incas, visions of ancient mummies come to life, a meteor about to destroy our very planet, thrilling Moon trips and exciting treasure hunts. That palpable sense of excitement and unsettling mystery provoked a lifelong interest in the unknown. The power of Tintin has also, it seems, grabbed two of our age's most creative forces in movie making, Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson. And I strongly suspect the three of us are not alone! FT







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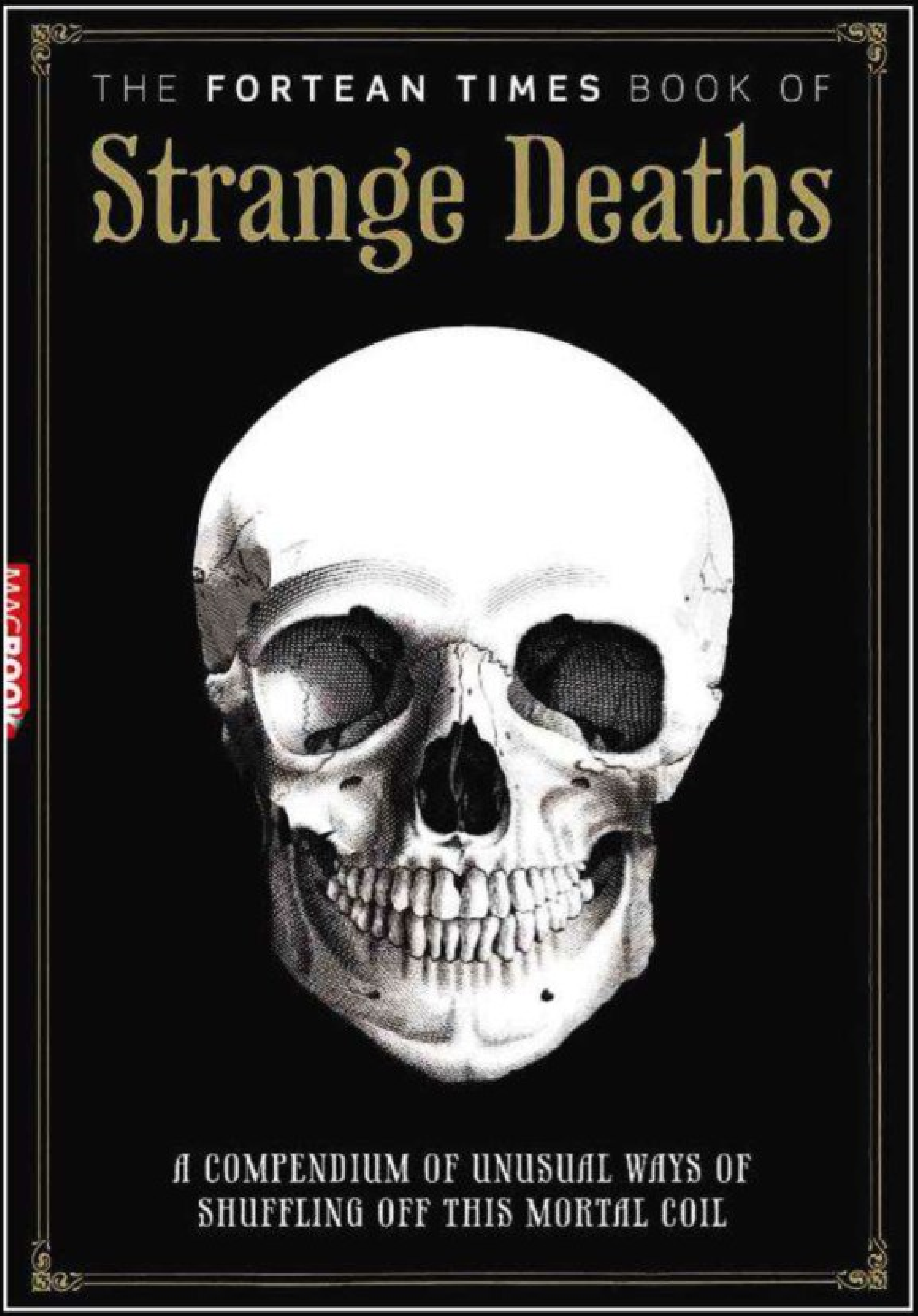
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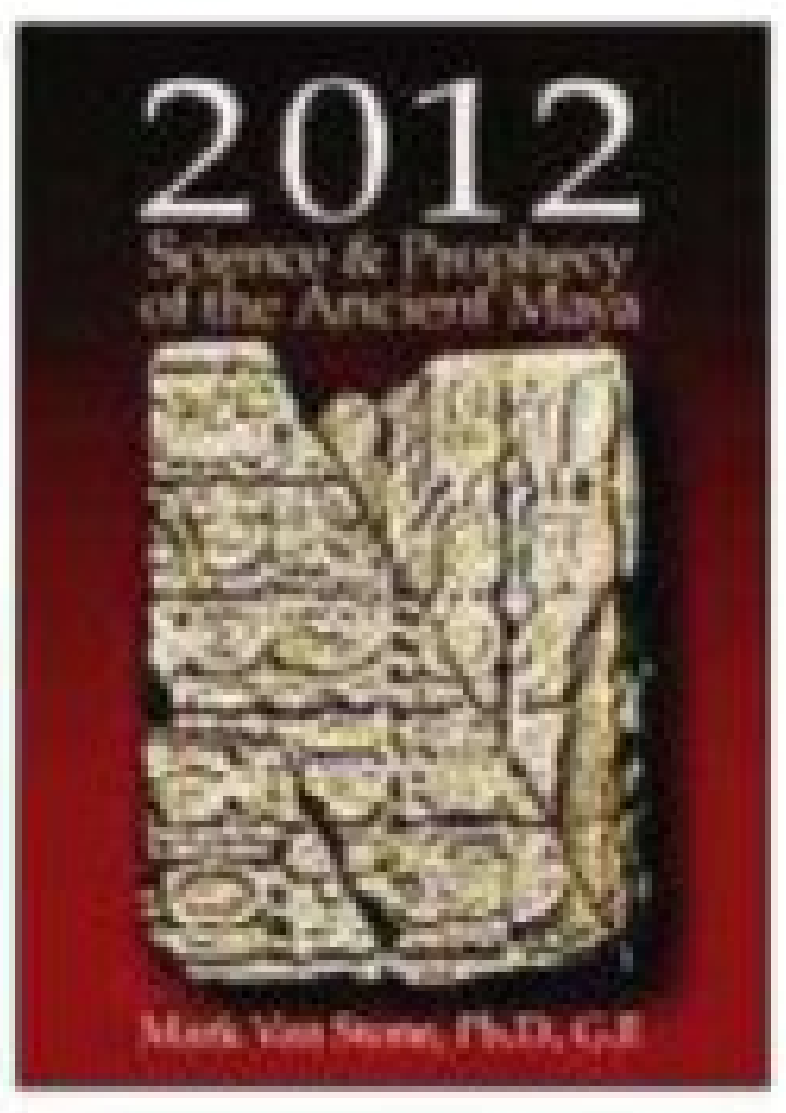
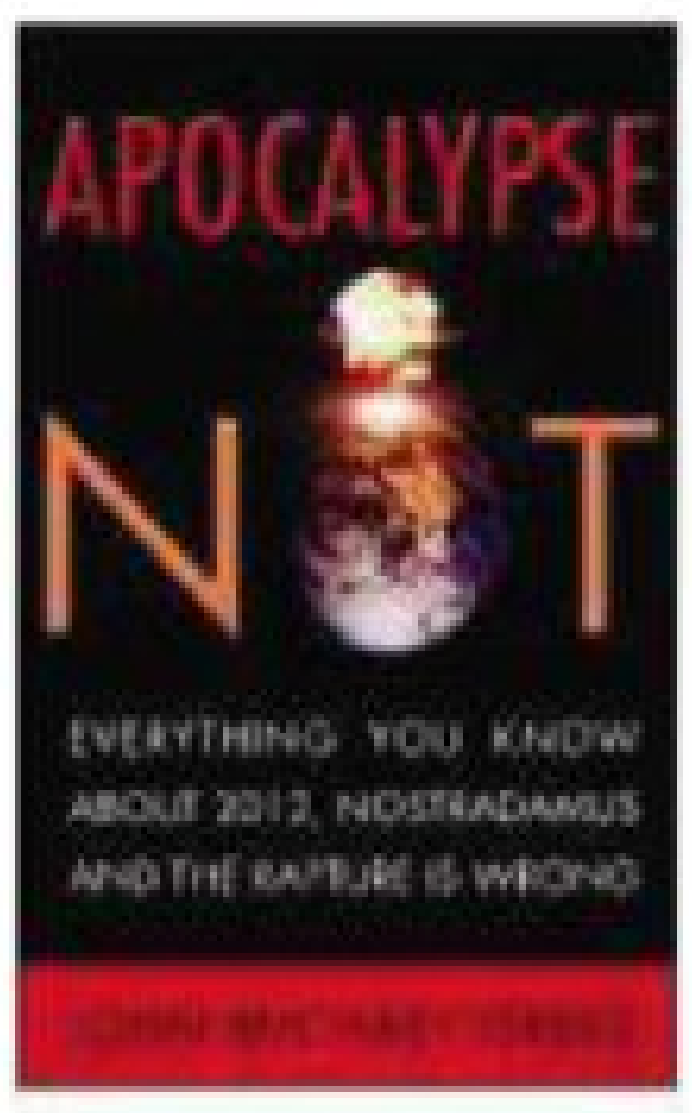
reviews

It's end-of-the-world party time

Two bracing and erudite correctives to the mountain of New Age 2012 voodoo tackle Mesoamerican culture and apocalyptic thinking in Western culture


2012
Science & Prophecy of the Ancient Maya
Mark Van Stone, Ph.D., C.E


APOCALYPSE
NOT
EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT 2012, NOSTRADAMUS AND THE RAPTURE IS WRONG

2012

Science and Prophecy of the Ancient Maya

Mark Van Stone

Tlacaélel Press 2010

Pb, 165pp, illus, bib, refs, $49.00/£33.00, ISBN 9780982682609

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £33.00

Apocalypse Not

A History of the End of Time

John Michael Greer

Viva Editions 2011

Pb, 224pp, notes, bib, ind, $15.95/£10.99, ISBN 9781936740000

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

Professor Van Stone knows his stuff: he studied Maya art and hieroglyphs under David Stuart and Michael Coe, and the late Linda Schele, one of the leaders of the renaissance in Maya studies as the baleful influence of EJ Thompson began to wane; and he co-wrote the standard introduction to Maya glyphs. He's well-placed, then, to cast a dry eye or two over the industry that's grown up around the New Age wheeze that a Great Change, or perhaps even the End of the World, will dumbfound us all on the Winter Solstice in 2012. 'Industry' isn't an exaggeration: it's been estimated that some 2,000 books extolling the great event will be in print by the time it happens.

Or more likely doesn't.

Van Stone gives you everything you need to know to see that 21 December 2012 is unlikely to be very different from any other day of that or any other year, and makes it extremely hard to argue that the Maya thought otherwise. The date (13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in in the Maya way of expressing it) turns up once, on one stela, in a relatively obscure provincial Maya town, Tortuguero. What the inscription that contains it means is somewhat open to doubt, as a large chunk of it is missing. "This," says Van Stone, "is what we call 'Murphy's Law of Epigraphy'." He initially quotes David Stuart's 2008 translation: "The Thirteenth Pik (Bak'tun) will end (on) 4 Ajaw, the 3rd of Uniiw (a.k.a. 3 K'ank'in). ?? will occur. (It will be) the descent(?) of the Nine Support? (God(s)) to the ??" and notes that the 'Nine Support God' (Bolon Yokté) may also be translated as 'Many Support [Gods]', 'Many-Strides God', 'Nine-Dog Tree', 'Many Feet', or 'Many-Root Tree', which doesn't get us very far. Bolon Yokté, unlike scads of other Mayan deities, was never important enough for anyone to paint his portrait, although he is known to have been a god of change and destruction.

Things go further downhill for apocalytophiliacs when Van Stone discusses current attempts to decipher the glyphs on Tortuguero stela 6 (as he waggishly remarks, scholarship is not monolithic). First, he offers us: "Seeing" – ?? will occur. (It will be) the descent(?) of Bolon Yok-té/Many-Strides? to the great? (or red?) -ma ?-??." As in many another academic discipline, Maya epigraphers work collaboratively, and he quotes exchanges with his colleagues in which the following revised translation is offered: "[On 13.0.0.0.0.] will happen, the witnessing/attending of the display of Bolon Yokté in the great impersonation (envelopment in costume and regalia)." Which is just a tad different. Then we learn that Yokté may refer to some kind of functionary acting as the feet of the god in a processional ritual. We see the end of the world as we know it slipping ever further into the distance and begin to glimpse the possibility of a parade and a jolly good party. Such as we might have at the turn of a millennium…

> **"We see the end of the world as we know it slipping ever further into the distance"**

There is vastly more to Van Stone's book than this. It offers a crash course in Maya culture, from their distribution in Mesoamerica to the significance of their notion of a world tree and the function of a 'serpent bar', the nature of their actual prophecies, and some rather pertinent demonstrations of their general lack of interest in solstices and the not very wondrous accuracy of their astronomy – as well as the abysmal inaccuracy of New Age astronomy. We also learn that there is many a reference in Maya inscriptions to dates much later than 13.0.0.0.0, if you still need a good reason to buy Christmas presents as usual in 2012. There's some rather wriggle-inducing stuff too about ritual/habitual piercing and bleeding of penises, and (eek) it's all copiously illustrated.

Illustrations abound throughout: wounded willies aside, they're one of this book's joys. If I have a reservation about it, it's that it's presented as a compendium: the author tells us we can start, continue, and end anywhere, dipping in and out as we like. That's all very po-mo, but it entails a certain loss of coherence, or even, dare I say, meta-narrative. Even so, entirely recommended.

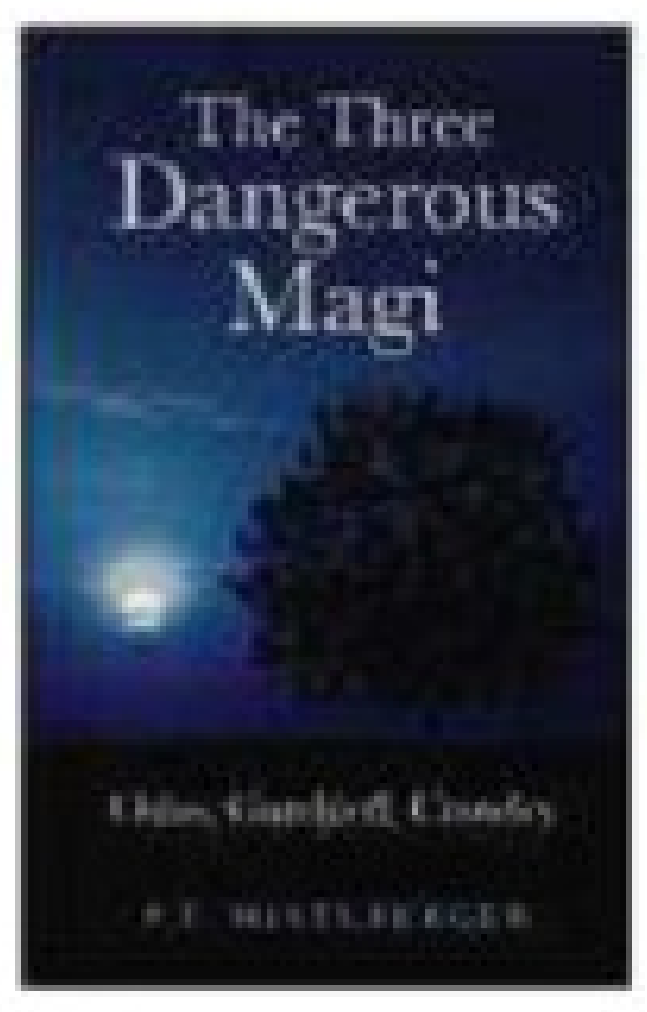
It was outside Prof. Van Stone's remit to reflect on why so many are so keen to see the world end in 2012. John Michael Greer takes up those cudgels in his short and pithy history of apocalyptic thinking in Western culture. He pinpoints its birth in monotheism and specifically Zoroastrianism, which in due course influenced Judaism and thence, of course, Christianity and Islam. Greer also looks at apocalyptic movements in China as well as, naturally, the Middle East, but at the heart of his book is the repeating tale – what's in effect a genealogy – of doomsday prophecies that came to naught in Europe and America, quite a few of them bloodily.

For hardcore forteans, his treatment of ufology will seem cursory, but at least he's noticed its apocalyptic nature. What he doesn't explore is its peculiarity: the strand that promises hell, in the shape of marauding Grays intent on taking over our bloodlines and our destiny, rather than promising love, light, and transfiguration. And in bundling chiliasm, messianism, millenarianism, and various forms of utopianism together as aspects of apocalypticism, Greer makes them seem more alike than they are. This is partly a product of his latching

Continued on page 58

Three kings

A triumph of comparative religion shines a light on 20th century left-field teachers



The Three Dangerous Magi

Osho, Gurdjieff, Crowley

PT Mistlberger

O Books 2010
Pb, 704pp, resources, bib, notes, £19.99, ISBN 9781846944352
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.99

There are plenty of books about Aleister Crowley, GI Gurdjieff and Osho (formerly Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh), three influential left-field spiritual teachers of the 20th century. Do we need another one, examining the lives and teachings of all three of them? The answer, in this case, is a resounding Yes.

The Three Dangerous Magi is an extraordinary comparative religious study from someone who knows his stuff. PT Mistlberger has studied and practised the teachings of all three of what he calls these "rascal sages" and "rogue mystics". When relevant, he cites his experience of studying with Osho, of whom he writes that, "as with Crowley and Gurdjieff, he was a force of nature and brought together, within himself, a remarkably vast spectrum of ideas and qualities". Occasionally he draws comparisons with other spiritual teachers, including Adi Da, Andrew Cohen, Chogyam Trungpa, Jiddu Krishnamurti and the anti-guru UG Krishnamurti.

The first six chapters outline the three teachers' lives and main teachings. The book ends with a section on the personal practice of the teachings of each of them, and another on the historical influences on their work. But the most innovative section is the middle portion of the book, where the author explores and compares various aspects of the three gurus. All three, for example, taught and practised versions of both the Right Hand Path, the usual spiritual path of personal improvement and reaching towards a higher being, and the Left Hand Path, intensive focus on one's self. All were flawed. Mistlberger writes that it is "part of their legend" that they "could arouse fear in others, with their 'take no prisoners' style of teaching". All used "manipulation tactics" on their followers. He covers their often problematic dealings with sex, and their over-use of drink or drugs. (Crowley's drug indulgence is well known; Gurdjieff "smoked like a chimney and at times drank like a fish"; Osho apparently dictated several books while under the influence of nitrous oxide.) All three had controversial communities characterised by "chaos, drama, heartbreak, breakthrough and breakdown": Crowley at Cefalu in Sicily, Gurdjieff near Fontainebleau and Osho at Rajneeshpuram in Oregon.

In an intriguing assessment, he calls the three: "kings of the night, superb at tackling the darker, grimier and virtually invisible levels of the psyche, the nasty elements that stand in the way of… wholeness. That they stumbled at times – occasionally falling flat on their faces – is to be expected. The night is dark and sometimes you can't see everything."

Considering its complex and contentious subject matter, this book is written not just with deep experiential knowledge but with simplicity: one of the most informative and enjoyable books of comparative religion I have ever read. Its one fault, which greatly reduces its scholarly value, is the lack of an index.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

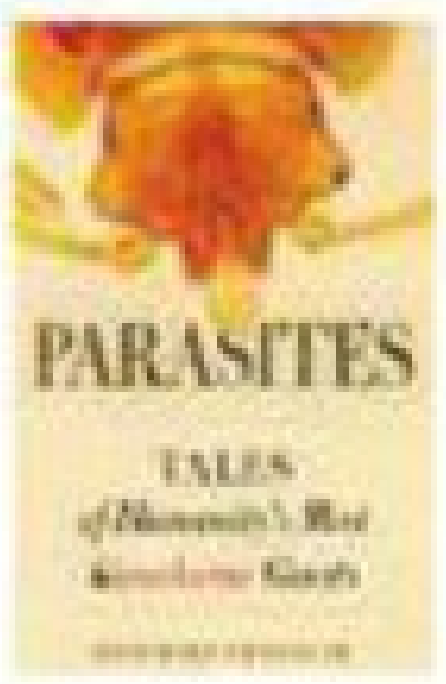
FASCINATING STUDY OF THREE GREAT SPIRITUAL ROGUES **9**

Parasites

Tales of Humanity's Most Unwelcome Guests

Rosemary Drisdelle

University of California Press 2011
Pb, 258pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £12.95, ISBN 9780520269774
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



Most people despise parasites, but I can't help but respect our biological squatters. Fleas can jump 30cm (12in) horizontally and 20cm (8in) vertically – equivalent to an athlete leaping 130m (430ft)and 85m (280ft) respectively. They're eloquent testaments to the potency of natural selection, having evolved, Darwin noted, "beautiful co-adaptations… in the humblest parasite which clings to the hairs of a quadruped or feathers of a bird." And, as Drisdelle points out in her wonderful new book, "parasites have shortened wars, protected ecosystems, and helped us craft standards for food and water that have made both infinitely safer." Parasites are even good for our health, alleviating numerous ailments including asthma and other allergies, inflammatory bowel disease and certain cancers by changing our immune responses.

So, despite their bad press, parasites bring benefits. But parasites also cause considerable harm. Drisdelle traces the intimate, but often uneasy, relationships between human and parasites from prehistory and the fall of Jericho (probably caused by the blood fluke *Schistosoma haematobium*) to our latest struggles with resistant malaria and the aptly named mite *Varroa destructor* that contributes to the marked decline in honeybee numbers.

Drisdelle also examines researchers' increasing recognition that some parasites alter their host's behaviour. I've suggested (**FT219:56–57**) that parasites might contribute to witch folklore. Drisdelle reviews the intriguing theory that the marked personality changes that overtook James Cook during his last voyage might have followed infection by *Ascaris lumbricoides* – a large intestinal roundworm – that produced vitamin B deficiency and associated psychological problems.

This handful of examples only scratches the surface of Drisdelle's biological smörgåsbord of anecdote, insight and evidence, illustrating how parasites touch almost every aspect of our lives and have a far greater economic, societal and health impact than most people – including many professional clinicians and biologists – realise. A few more illustrations might have helped non-biologists understand parasites' often complex life cycles. But that aside, *Parasites* is a wonderful popular introduction to one of biology's most fascinating lifestyles.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

A FASCINATING LOOK AT OUR BIOLOGICAL SQUATTERS **10**

Savage Genesis

The Missing Page

Stan Hall

Stan Hall 2011
Pb, 320pp, illus,£12.00, ISBN 9781906146085
AVAILABLE FROM WWW.BLURB.COM

I'm curious how well-known Stan Hall is among forteans; I haven't seen many references to him or his work in books and magazines (other than in connection with von Däniken's controversial account of the metal library).

A brief search of the main Velikovskian and catastrophist sites does not turn up his name. Yet at one time, Hall had enough pull to get lunar (and stellar?) astronaut Neil Armstrong to join him on an expedition to Ecuador, in search of the legendary golden library of Tayos.

I came across Hall's work by a roundabout route. Several of my Hungarian in-laws are scholars, and they told me about the theory that Hungarian is related closely to ancient Sumerian, and also to a number of native dialects in Ecuador. This led me to Janos Moricz Opos (also known as Juan Moricz) and his theories of transatlantic connections between the early Hungarians / Sumerians and the classical civilisations of Central and South America. Hall was one of the few Western Europeans to know Moricz and his work (he got there via von Däniken) and one of the very few to act on Moricz's claims that there was a cavern in central Ecuador where a vast library of metal books was to be found, and that these books told the true story of the demise of Atlantis.

Atlantis, in Moricz's rendition, is Atl Andes, a supposed reference to early American civilisation's central place in the ancient world. Hall buttresses this claim by reference to the second-century world map of Claudius Ptolemy, and the apparent resemblance of ancient place names in the Americas and elsewhere in the world, including Britain.

At the very least, he makes a case for the Hungarians being the most interesting people on Earth.

Savage Genesis is Hall's main theoretical statement. It offers the background to his other books (*Tayos Gold*, *Tayos Dawn*, and *Tayos Fever*) and sets them in the context of catastrophist theory in general. Hall's starting point is Velikovsky, and his exposition includes much that will be familiar to anyone who has read Velikovsky's work: electric universe theory; the birth of Venus from Jupiter; and mythological sources taken as *prima facie* evidence of planetary catastrophes within human memory.

Hall's theorising is laced with a vein of mysticism – a dour, straight-laced mysticism in many respects – and a hint of Utopian optimism. This doesn't interfere too badly, although I found it irritating and irrelevant.

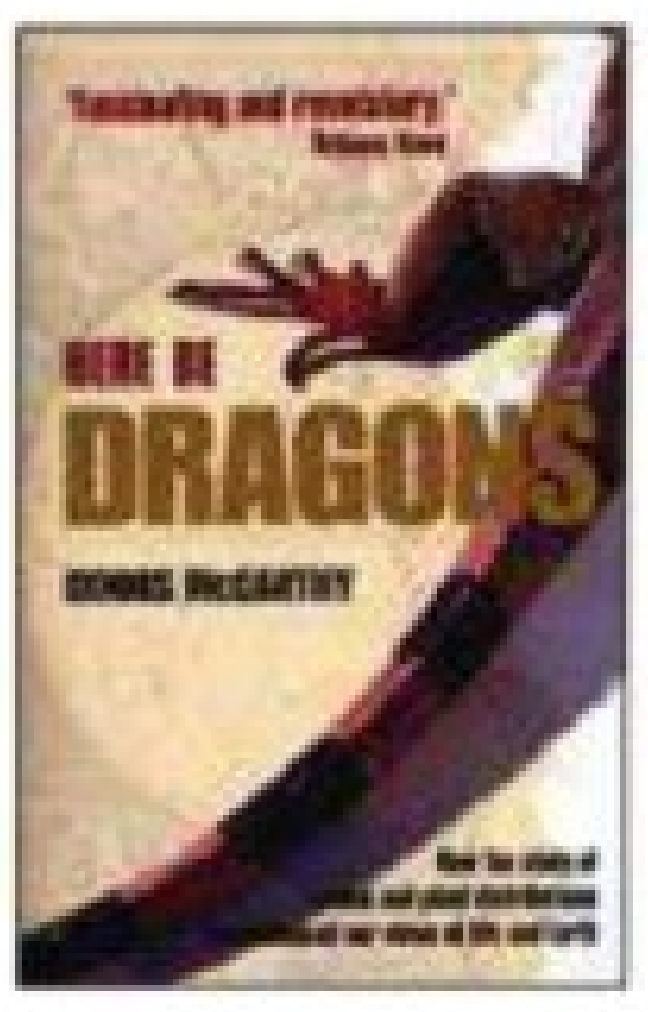
He focuses on Velikovsky's idea that the celestial events around the birth of Venus give rise to religion as we know it, and to our culture of violence; somehow, the reader gets the feeling that Hall wants to find a cure for this cultural pathology through an imaginative reappraisal of the past, healing through hermeneutics.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict
INTERESTING FOR HUNGARIANS AND STRAIGHT-LACED MYSTICS **5**

Ammo for rationalists

Biogeography explains why the Arctic has bears and foxes and why the Antarctic has penguins but no emus or possums



Here Be Dragons

How the study of animal and plant distributions revolutionized our views of life and Earth

Dennis McCarthy

Oxford University Press 2011

Pb, 214pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £8.99/$18.95, ISBN 7980199595662

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.54

This celebration of biogeography – the study of the "lopsided distribution" of plants, animals, continents and even empires – begins by pointing out that Linnæus, Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace and continental drift pioneer Alfred Wegener all did ground-breaking work in biogeography, before going on to revolutionise other fields.

Wegener was an adventurer, like most of the great biogeographers. He broke the early 20th-century records for ballooning endurance and longest icecap crossing, before dying in a Greenland blizzard. His views on continental drift, and those of Alexander Du Toit, who followed him, were an "outsiders' struggle against convention". The orthodox theory relied on "miraculous rafters" who crossed oceans on bits of fallen tree, and of vast piles of yet to be discovered fossils that would prove that continents were fixed. The continental drifters were finally vindicated by the discovery in the 1960s of a spreading seafloor younger than the continents.

McCarthy writes beautifully and his story is compelling. He comes up with one of my all-time favourite chapter headings, 'The Bloody Fall of South America and the Last of the Triassic Beak-headed Reptiles'. This gives a passing mention to the bison-sized 'ratzilla', the prehistoric guinea pig *Jesephoartigisia monesi*, which weighed a metric tonne.

Biogeography explains why there are bears and foxes in the Arctic but not the Antarctic, and McCarthy devotes much space to the "terminal Eocene event" that resulted in the "death of nearly all vertebrate life in Antarctica." Compared with this very rapid mass extinction, the demise of the dinosaurs was a picnic. McCarthy comments that there is "beneath the ice-sheets a continent-wide boneyard", with the stoic penguins as the only surviving year-round Antarctic vertebrates.

Dragons even has a rare illustration of a just pre-glacial verdant Antarctic landscape populated with emu-like birds, sloths, falcons, possum-type creatures, something resembling a small cat, and a hefty hoofed mammal that looks like a horse-elephant cross. Pre-glacial Antarctic fauna is neglected in many books on prehistoric life for the general reader, so it's nice to see it get a look-in.

As for the title, the routine appearance of 'Here be Dragons' on ancient maps is itself a myth. The Latin phrase appears on only one known artefact, the Hunt-Lenox Globe, made three years after Columbus, and McCarthy says it could have been used to identify the origin of Komodo dragon rumours.

Dragons reveals that Wallace's line, the world's "most famous biotic barrier" separating placental mammals from marsupials, is at its narrowest "a mere 25 miles" (40km). The final chapter suggests the reason why the "genetic range of human beings is astonishingly narrow" is that we are "athletic generalists of the first rank" – most geographical barriers to species crossing can be climbed, swum or rafted over by humans. The authentic cuisine of "primeval paradise" Hawaii, and the flowers that make up its *lei* garlands, were introduced by Polynesians some time after AD 500. Hawaiian pigs originated in Vietnam and its sweet potatoes came from a returning Polynesian expedition to Chile, while Captain Cook brought the pineapples. Meanwhile, there's one tree-dwelling skink whose "weirdly wide" distribution – on the far-flung islands of Samoa, Tonga and Futura – reflects the "irregular domain" of the 16th- and 17th-century Tongan monarchs.

It's hard to find anything wrong with *Dragons*. You might skip the chapters on fish biogeography. The date for the demise of *Homo floresiensis* seems a little recent. But such quibbles are insignificant. McCarthy tells us it was the fact that the Galapagos Islands "lacked frogs" that first got Darwin thinking that "natural theology" may have had holes in it. The author convincingly argues that biogeography, a relatively easy concept, is our best ammunition against current "intelligent design" and Creationist nonsense. And he argues this in an engaging fashion.

Matt Salusbury

Fortean Times Verdict
COULD BIOGEOGRAPHY BE THE NEW ROCK 'N' ROLL? **8**

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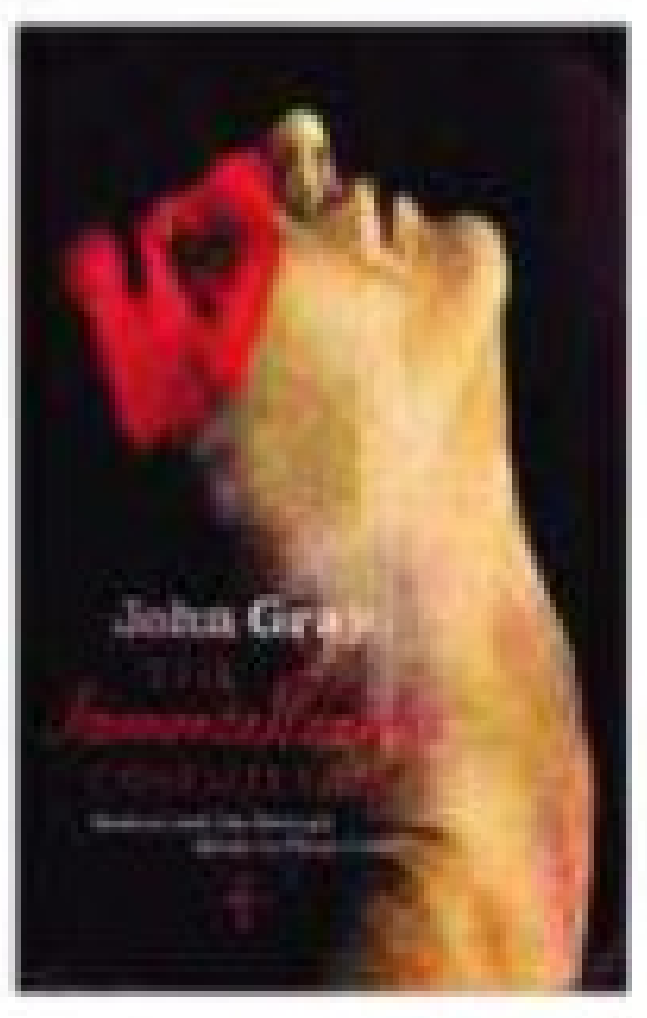
Deathless pros

A badly considered dismissal of survival studies and early psychical research



The Immortalization Commission

Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death

John Gray

Allen Lane 2011
Hb, 272pp, illus, notes, £18.99, ISBN 9781846142192
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £15.99

Reading *The Immortalization Commission* leaves one with a sense of dislocation as one tries to make sense of the hodge-podge of historical trivia and anecdotes John Gray throws together in a quest to demonstrate that human beings are mortal, a notion that has been around since well before the Classical Age.

Gray devotes the first part of the book to undermining the work of early pioneers in paranormal research, specifically those persons who were part of the Society for Psychical Research. He seems to think that pointing out the follies of this early work is revolutionary. Numerous papers written by members of the American and British SPRs of the mid- and late-20th and early-21st centuries have cast doubt upon the early work of the SPR. Pioneers had to start somewhere, and science is developed by a slow process of disproving hypotheses.

Gray then vaults from capitalist Western Europe to the Soviet Union. Musings from Lenin, a few references to Nazis, and even Wells's belief that the majority of human beings should be removed in order to promote the evolution of the species are thrown in. He appears to be trying to deride the early, naïve, Soviet notion that death might be defeated through technological progress, though he does so not as an academic, but with a politician's mud-slinging.

In the third section, his errors grow more dire. "While the search for evidence of human survival of death has petered out, the belief that science can deliver a technological surrogate for immortality has grown stronger." Has John Gray read anything from the field of survival studies in the last 10 years? It is charged with interesting findings from fields as disparate as neuroscience and astrophysics. He mentions that there is some resurgence in research, but cites only a widely discarded experiment.

The single kernel of wisdom in *The Immortalization Commission* occurs when Gray cites a shortcoming of science. "Science is a tool for problem-solving… [but] it has this peculiarity, that when it is most successful it creates new problems, some of which are insoluble." He notes that in this era of melting nuclear reactors, planetary-wide industrial pollution, extinctions, wars and overpopulation, there is a zeitgeist of profound doubt in the promises of science and the capabilities of technology, yet even this observation is unremarkable, having long since been noted and acted upon by those in back-to-the-land and simplicity movements, by rewilders, by environmentalists and ecologists, and by anyone working to reshape values and economics. Yet Gray seems capable of offering no commentary on their efforts other than stating that since previous efforts at amelioration have failed so must future ones.

Anyone interested in reading about survival studies would not have to look far to find more useful material.

Cliff Seruntine

Fortean Times Verdict

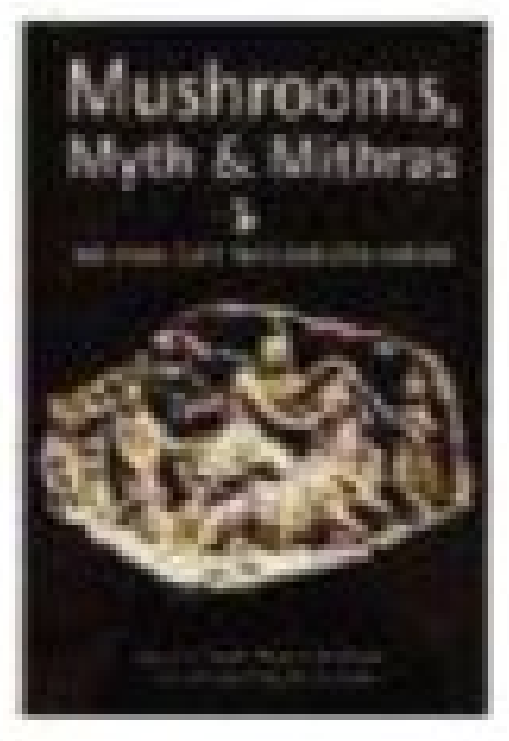
PREJUDICE RATHER THAN EVIDENCE BOLSTERS ARGUMENTS 3

Mushrooms, Myth & Mithras

The Drug Cult that Civilized Europe

Carl Ruck, Mark Hoffman, Jose Celdrain

City Lights Books 2011
Pb, 300pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780872864702
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £15.29



The authors contend that the Mithraic mystery religion emerged from a magic mushroom rite practised in the Aryan 'soma' religions (Zoroastrianism, the Vedas). The *Amanita muscaria* was "too sacred to be explicitly identified", but its coded depiction in art enables them to identify it as an entheogenic sacrament.

The correlation of the wild *Amanita* with the rock and the pinecone, in-plain-sight symbols in Christianity and Greek mythology, typifies the book's high mythographic thinking, though some of the conclusions strain to convince. Christ's Nativity and the Last Supper are conceived as a hallucinogenic feast, reminding one of John Allegro's explorations of religious etymology. Mithraism's secret sacrament in pre-Christian Mediterranean cultures' mythology, symbolism and art is explained in a welcome departure from the Siberio-Shamanistic investigation of magic mushrooms that has dominated since Gordon Wasson's 1950s book. Mithraism declined from a peak in Roman Europe, but the authors argue that its appeal in Europe was felt up to the post-Enlightenment revolutions of France and America. There is a tip of the hat to Freemasonry, but alchemy, which could be very promising considering some of the animal symbolism, gets no look-in.

Attuning to the authors' strain of mycological mythology is time well spent, especially if the mycological magic of Terence McKenna or the palæobotany of Paul Devereux is your thing. The Americas and the Siberian steppes have been the domain of the historic shroom. Now it has an identity in Europe.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict

RECLAIMS MAGIC MUSHROOM ART AND SYMBOLISM 7

Continued from page 55

on to the otiose term 'meme', as in 'the apocalypse meme', which (like some other products of its inventor) tends to obscure more than it illuminates.

This is an absorbing book nonetheless, often taking the reader down byways through the history of ideas that don't often feature in popular history – such as the false Messiahs of mediæval Judaism, or the roots of secular utopianism in the obscurantist heretical theology of Joachim of Flores. We also meet a few very mad people, such as Charles Fourier (1772–1837), who foresaw a coming age of 'Harmony', which would open with a rain of "cosmic citric acid" that would turn the seas to lemonade; the Earth would gain four more, formerly lost, moons; lions would turn vegetarian; and humanity would henceforth spend much time eating, drinking, and fornicating in groups. The driving force for all this was 'Passional Attraction'. One wonders if Alfred William Lawson, for whom Suction had a passional attraction, had encountered Fourier.

Greer suggests that secular apocalyptics like Marx and his apostles never caught on in the USA the way they did in Europe because Middle America (unlike the *soi-disant* élites on the coasts) kept its eyes firmly on the prospect of Biblical salvation. Reaction to the Great Disappointment of 1844, when William Miller's enormously influential prophecy of World's End ended in débâcle, is still with us, he shows, although by now it has developed secular mutations (the 'end of history', the Singularity, &c). Greer lays on a rumbustious demolition of New Age claims about 2012 and names and shames their instigators. He ends with some intriguing reflections on the appeal of the (alleged) Great Change of 2012, and I won't party-poop by revealing them here: you should buy the book. It's not the ultimate guide to 2012, but it's a damn good start.

Peter Brookesmith

Fortean Times Verdict

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The Woman

Dir Lucky McKee, US 2011
Currently on limited UK release

There have been a few films about feral children – Truffaut's *L'enfant sauvage*, Herzog's *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, and Michael Apted's Jodie Foster vehicle *Nell* spring to mind – and the horror film has long been obsessed with the idea of survivals of (cannibal tribes and apemen) or regressions to (*Mr Hyde*, *Leatherface*) a savage state.

Lucky McKee's *The Woman*, co-written with celebrated horror writer Jack Ketchum, was a major talking point at this year's Frightfest, and sits somewhere between these extremes of arthouse fare and full-on horror. While the three films mentioned above were either based on or inspired by real events, *The Woman* is an entirely fictional genre piece; it plays as if *Nell* had been remade as a satirical exploitation movie by Luis Buñuel, and with its mixture of thoughtfulness and gore it probably won't please mainstream audiences, even if festival crowds take it to their hearts.

Country lawyer Chris Cleek (Sean Bridgers) is out hunting one day when he stumbles upon a wild woman in the woods near his remote rural home. He watches her eat a live fish, follows her to her den and – clearly finding her sexually attractive – returns next day to capture her. Having knocked her out, he chains her up in the fruit cellar; when she comes to – a growling, hissing, spitting wildcat – she bites off half of Chris's ring finger and spits out his wedding ring – an early indicator of where this might be going. Oddly unfazed, Chris decides to persevere with his project, and – this is where things begin to get considerably stranger and more interesting – shares it with his family.

It's this emphasis on family life that sets the film apart; where we might have expected a scenario in which 'the man' simply abuses his victim (in his attempts to 'civilise' her, he does, of course), it's the positioning of the feral captive as a family concern, in which Cleek's wife and three children are all given jobs to do, as if raising a stray animal, that dominates the film's trajectory; and, as we watch their bizarre acceptance of, and differing reactions to, the situation, we realise that – like the mysterious stranger in Pasolini's *Theorem* – the Woman will be a catalyst for (violent) change in this particular male-headed household. The blank, disengaged look in the eyes of long-suffering wife Belle has already alerted us to the fact that something's not quite right with this family, and as the story unfolds we get further hints of a whole history of dysfunction beneath the prosperous, all-American veneer.

I'm still not convinced by all of McKee's directorial decisions – the wall-to-wall alt-rock soundtrack creates a nicely ironic, distancing effect at times, and veers dangerously close to overkill at others – but he tells his story with focus and conviction, aided by some remarkably good performances (including frequent McKee collaborator Angela Bettis as Belle). But it's the brilliant Bridger who steals the show as classic 'right man' (cf. Colin Wilson and AE van Vogt) Chris, who, with his disturbingly upbeat and subtly bullying persona, comes across like a creepy and deranged Tom Hanks – a perfect and resonant bit of casting, if ever there was one.

The film is sometimes shocking, and builds to a predictably bloody catharsis in its excavation and subsequent demolition of misogyny, but it also offers far more subversive food for thought than the usual genre fare.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
MCKEE'S FERAL OFFERING IS JET BLACK ENTERTAINMENT **8**

Real Steel

Dir Shawn Levy, US 2011
On UK release from 14 October

In the near future, down-on-his luck ex-boxer Charlie Kenton (Hugh Jackman) makes a living from wrangling giant robots in loser bouts and town fun-fair match-ups with the local bull. His carefree days are ended when he takes custody of his estranged 11-year-old son Max, who proves more than a match for his dad in the wisecracking stakes. Any darker exploration of humanity desensitised by technology in a screenplay based on the Richard Matheson short story 'Steel' is soon abandoned when father and son start sparring. When Max's pet robot is given a shot at the world title, it's *Rocky* meets *The Champ*. The emotional outcome is inevitable, but the awesome metal-men battles show us what *Transformers* thought it was, Jackman is impressive and only those with robot hearts will be left dry-eyed by the end of this sentimental onslaught from Dreamworks.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict
ROBOT WARS IN THE BOXING RING: CHAMPION! **7**

The Strange World of Gurney Slade

Dir various, UK 1960
Network DVD, £14.99

Although this Anthony Newley-starring series predates the 'swinging Sixties' by several years (it was made in 1960), you'd be forgiven for thinking that its weirdness had been inspired by some kind of bad trip. Acclaimed as an inspiration for such diverse shows as *The Prisoner*, *The Mighty Boosh* and *Psychoville*, *The Strange World of Gurney Slade* is, in fact, unique.

These six half-hours come from 50 years ago, yet seem strangely up-to-date in their freeform attitude and tradition-busting approach to TV comedy. In fact, 'comedy' might be too strong a word, as *Gurney Slade* features more gentle whimsy rather than outright laughter.

The fourth wall is shattered immediately, as Newley walks off the sitcom set into the 'real' world, where things are even weirder than on TV. There follows a torrent of surreal situations, such as a court appearance due to a sense of humour failure, and the use of internal monologues as evidence. It's interesting, wacky stuff, but the series failed to make an impact upon initial transmission on ITV and was quickly dumped in a graveyard slot after just one episode.

Singer and actor Newley – once married to Joan Collins – comes out of this well, but it's important to remember that many of the tricks pulled here were being done for the first time, even if they're very familiar to us now. However, it's strangely subversive stuff.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
ODD BUT IMPORTANT BIT OF ARCHIVE TELEVISION **6**

Camelot: Complete First Season

Dir various, US 2010
Entertainment One, £25

With copious nudity, sex, swearing and violence, this unnecessary retelling of the King Arthur myth is clearly going for the *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* audience. Unfortunately, it doesn't have the same all-out conviction that made the earlier series such camp fun.

Camelot goes wrong from the start in casting *Twilight* pretty boy Jamie Campbell Bower as Arthur; not so much a king as a server at Burger King. The show is worth watching for the scene-stealing antics of Eva Green (in or out of her clothes) as his magical half-sister Morgan who lusts after the throne, and Joseph Fiennes as a strangely subdued, bald-headed version of Merlin. They both practise magic, but not often enough to give this show a mystical edge (fantasy fans are better served by *Game of Thrones*) although this is a grittier take than the BBC's *Merlin*.

The series starts well, but by the end all ambition appears to have evaporated, with would-be epic battles reduced to a few stuntmen sparring in an Irish field. It's a shame, as *Camelot* looks good but never overcomes the miscasting of the central role.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
LACKING IN MAGIC, IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD **5**

The Lost Bladesman

Dir Alan Mak/Felix Chong, China US 2009
Icon Home Entertainment, £15.99

Nearly 50 and a martial artist since the age of four, it's fair to say Donnie Yen's star has taken an awfully long time to ascend. A veteran of the Jackie Chan era, he starred in the knockabout *Drunken Tai Chi* (1984) at the tender age of 19, but despite notable scenes in Jet Li movies he seemed doomed to play mere henchmen in his few Hollywood appearances, such as *Blade II* (2002).

The last few years have changed that, with incredible performances in *Ip Man I* and *II* (2008/2010) and *14 Blades* (2010) and Yen now joins the pantheon of great martial arts superstars: Lee, Chan and the aforementioned Jet Li, whose career he's on the verge of eclipsing.

Why so long? Probably usually playing baddies is never a good career move for a quick launch into the hearts of the Chinese people; after all, these films are usually morality plays of a sort. Or maybe it's his morose presence and gaunt visage (for a good-looking man, he's adept at doing ugly, both physical and moral).

Thankfully *The Lost Bladesman* plays to Yen's strengths; another retelling of the classic historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (also inspiration for Woo's *Red Cliff* and Daniel Lee's *Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon*), this masterpiece (not a word commonly thrown-around when describing kickflicks of any hue), was co-written and directed by Alan Mak and Felix Chong, responsible for the hugely successful and influential *Infernal Affairs* trilogy.

It's huge and ambitious, and has been praised with superlatives like 'epic', 'glorious' and 'gorgeous'; it helps if you're a fan of vast, brutal battles and savagery and suffering on a grand scale…

But this is to make it sound like just another historical epic, and it's far more than that. Look at Yen's character, the aging warrior Guan Yun Chang: his hairline's thinning and his dye cheap and hastily applied. His make-up is anachronistic, his values and etiquette mocked as quaint. He wishes for peace, but someone somewhere is going to try and make their reputation by killing him; and he always has to rise to the occasion, thus merely adding to his body count and reputation.

The Lost Bladesman owes much to the Western; *The Shootist* (1976) and *Unforgiven* (1992), possibly John Wayne and Clint Eastwood's respective finest moments, come to mind. All share the theme of the aged and jaded killer, hounded by his own reputation as much as by those engaged in a vainglorious quest for some sort of immortality.

It is this world-weariness, melancholy and sense of resignation to (his) fate that suffuses Donny Yen's performance and makes this film unmissable.

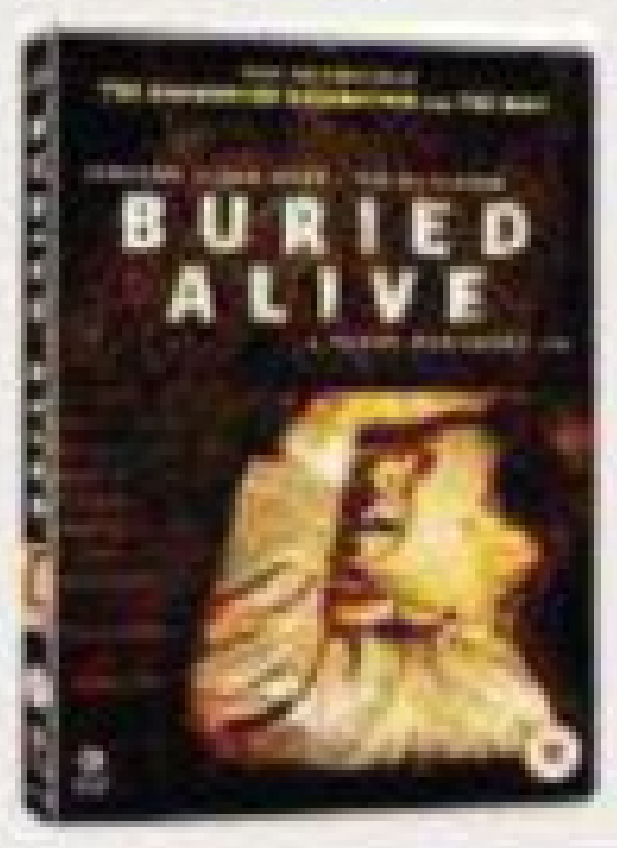
Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict
DID I ALREADY USE THE WORD MASTERPIECE? **9**

SHORTS

BURIED ALIVE

(Second Sight, £9.99)



Curiosity value is high in this made-for-TV early Frank Darabont (*The Shawshank Redemption*) outing. Scheming wife Joanna (Jennifer Jason Leigh) plots with her lover to dispatch her architect husband (Tim Matheson) and claim the insurance. She poisons him and buries him ("Die, damn you!") just to make sure, but doesn't count on some dodgy poison and a ropey old casket. Nor does she count on dodgy lover Cort who has his own terminal plans for Joanna. The last hour of the film is a three-way battle for survival as husband Clint, fresh from the grave, turns his home into a maze to torment his tormenters. Confined more by its TV origins than by its execution, this 1990 directorial debut from Darabont is an entertaining affair with a solid cast headed by a pitch-perfect Ms Nasty performance from Leigh. **NČ 6/10**

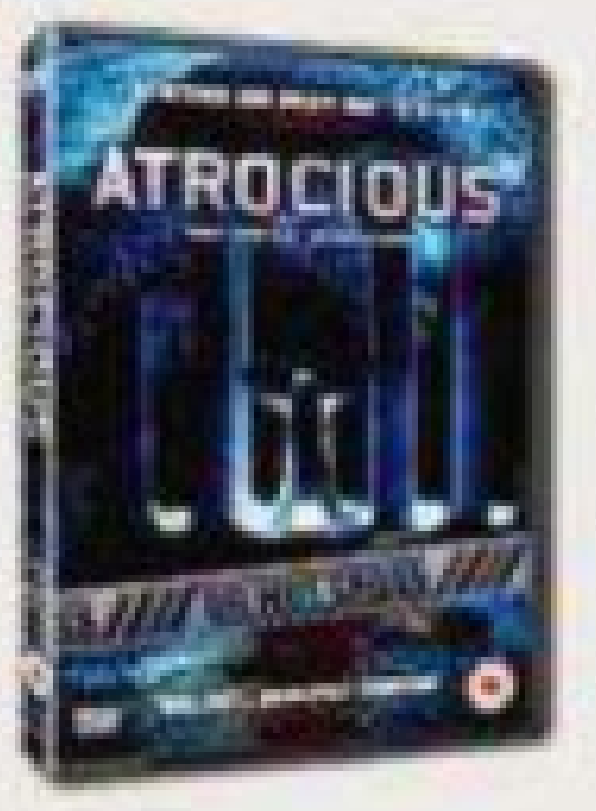
DON'T LOOK NOW

(Optimum Home Entertainment, £15.99)

Somewhat mystifyingly voted best-ever British film in a recent poll, Nic Roeg's classic tale of terror is undeniably one of the most memorable of the 1970s and emerges in this spiffed-up Blu-ray release with its splintered-mirror surface looking as dazzling as one would hope. I doubt that this insidiously disturbing tale of a grieving couple, a dead child, and a blind medium set in a labyrinthine and wintry Venice needs any introduction; and if you haven't seen it, this release is equally self-recommending really, so why wait? Good extras too. **DS 9/10**

ATROCIOUS

(Revolver Entertainment, £12.99)



Calling a movie *Atrocious* is just asking for trouble, isn't it? I can't see that being Spanish, like writer/director Fernando Barreda Luna, is any excuse, even allowing for things getting lost in translation. Bored teens staying at an enormous country pile (which their parents seem to have forgotten they own for a decade, as you do) grab their video cameras to investigate an overgrown maze and a local ghost story; cue an hour of crappy night vision footage as they run around shouting "Fuck!" a lot. *Blair Witch*, *•Rec* and even *Paranormal Activity* all managed to underlay their 'found footage' æsthetic with a strong enough narrative spine to support and partially motivate their handheld antics; this is just plain lazy, shamelessly derivative (particularly of *Blair Witch*) and unforgiveably witless tripe. Atrocious? Yes; but the filmmakers could have saved a few letters and just called this movie *Shite*. **DS 1/10**

SHIVER

(Second Sight, £12.99)

Another generic title, another recent Spanish horror movie; at least this one has a more original premise. The film follows a highly photosensitive teen and his mum from the city to the country (rarely an advisable itinerary in horror movies) in a search for a home with a lot less sunlight. They end up in a tiny mountain village but soon discover the natives are a rum bunch and there's something nasty lurking in the surrounding woods to boot – but is this flesh-chomping horror a myth, a monster or a dark local secret? **DS 5/10**

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

PC £34.99 Xbox360, PS3 £49.99,
Eidos Montreal /Square Enix

Often cited in polls as the greatest game ever made, the original *Deus Ex* is still referenced as a key release in paving the way for the sophisticated narrative potential of the medium, in which individual choices can affect the entire outcome of the experience for the gamer. Perhaps there was nothing entirely new in that concept in a game, except that *Deus Ex* was a big release with big ambitions (of the kind that frequently end in tears and lead straight to the bargain bins) originating from a stable, Eidos, which was mining gold at the time with classic titles like *Tomb Raider* and *Thief*. Add to that striking element of narrative diversity the splicing together of an essentially first person shooter experience with an RPG-style approach to character customisation and decision-making, and the rest, as they say, is history. These days, of course, you can't move for first person shooters with RPG elements, character customisation through verbal responses and action stories set in dystopian futures.

Then came the sequel, *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. It shifted shed-loads at the time, all right, but its critical reception was far from positive by the time the dust of hope and hype settled. It reduced the RPG elements and augmentation options and, with a playing time shorter than its predecessors, disproved the adage that less is more. So what happened in between? Consoles, in a word; the sequel had been simplified to fit the platform. Which has been a common failing for many previously great games series ever since.

Well, almost a decade on and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* arrives in a blaze of PR hype and gamer junkie expectation. Like any self-respecting addict, forgetting how disappointing the last fix was, you try to convince yourself that this time it will be better. Thankfully, for the most part, it damn well is.

Cleverly employing some of the best elements from the original and utilising many of the innovations added by the flood of games that followed in its wake, *DE:HR* recaptures much of the sense of free-roaming and geeky tinkering in that well-stocked customisation shed in the corner of bedrooms the world over that made the original so great. It is a prequel, set about 20 years before the events of *Deus Ex*, when bio-mechanical augmentation, sourced by a few big-balled companies, threatens to destabilise society. Added to that, Adam Jensen (as whom you play) given his own augmentations, gets the sort of mixed reception that the vampires enjoy in *True Blood*; which means you have to be careful out on the high street on a Friday night.

Tasked with tracking down those responsible for attacks on his company, security officer Jensen's sneaking and shoot-'em-up perambulations make him as thick as thieves with those responsible for creating UNATCO, a global anti-terrorist organisation. We've seen and heard it all before, but criticising the *Deus Ex* series for being derivative is like suggesting that *Seven Samurai* is a rip off of *The Magnificent Seven*.

A title stands or falls on its gameplay, and the gameplay in *DE:HR* is for the most part outstanding. It's not quite the nook-and-cranny exploration of yore, and, despite all the side missions you may come upon, the sense of free roaming is perhaps more perception than reality. Nevertheless, this game gives you choices. Lots of them – be they augmentations, approaches to a threat, tailoring the nature of Jensen's character or wondering whether you can take out that grunt with the two bullets you have left in your pistol (and get hold of his, reload and kill his mates before they mow you down) or should just bottle out and make a crawl for it via another handy air vent. The third-person cover mode, again nothing new, makes perfect sense for a game in which stealth is a crucial element.

And you need it, because the enemy AI, for all your augmentations, can within seconds have you staring at the red screen of death. Jensen's hand-to-hand combat moments kick into third-person slow-mo mode in which breaking bones and spraying blood take on a sick balletic beauty.

Whereas *Splinter Cell* was all grim-jawed and deadly serious, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* shows us it's just a mad, mad world in which maniacal inner-laughter at the Grand Guignol absurdity of the violence on display can go a long way to getting you through another dystopic day.

My main criticism of the game is its cutaways; they're too long, too enamoured of themselves and too slow in delivery. The balance between delivering a cinematic experience while at the same time giving the gamer useful information for the purpose of a mission isn't quite right, and remains as clunky a device as it ever was. Regardless of the acting chops on display, too much of it simply stops you from playing the game. However, the augmentation options are dizzying, the gunplay, the turning of household objects into killing implements, the hacking and the hoofing it through another reassuring global conspiracy in *Blade Runner*-like cities all make for a super-immersive experience. No six hours of set pieces followed by hundreds of hours of red-eye-repetition online, this.

Eidos Montreal, I salute you for reminding me, and hopefully many of your industry peers, just how great a game can be. And all of it executed on a bloody gamepad. Whatever next?

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

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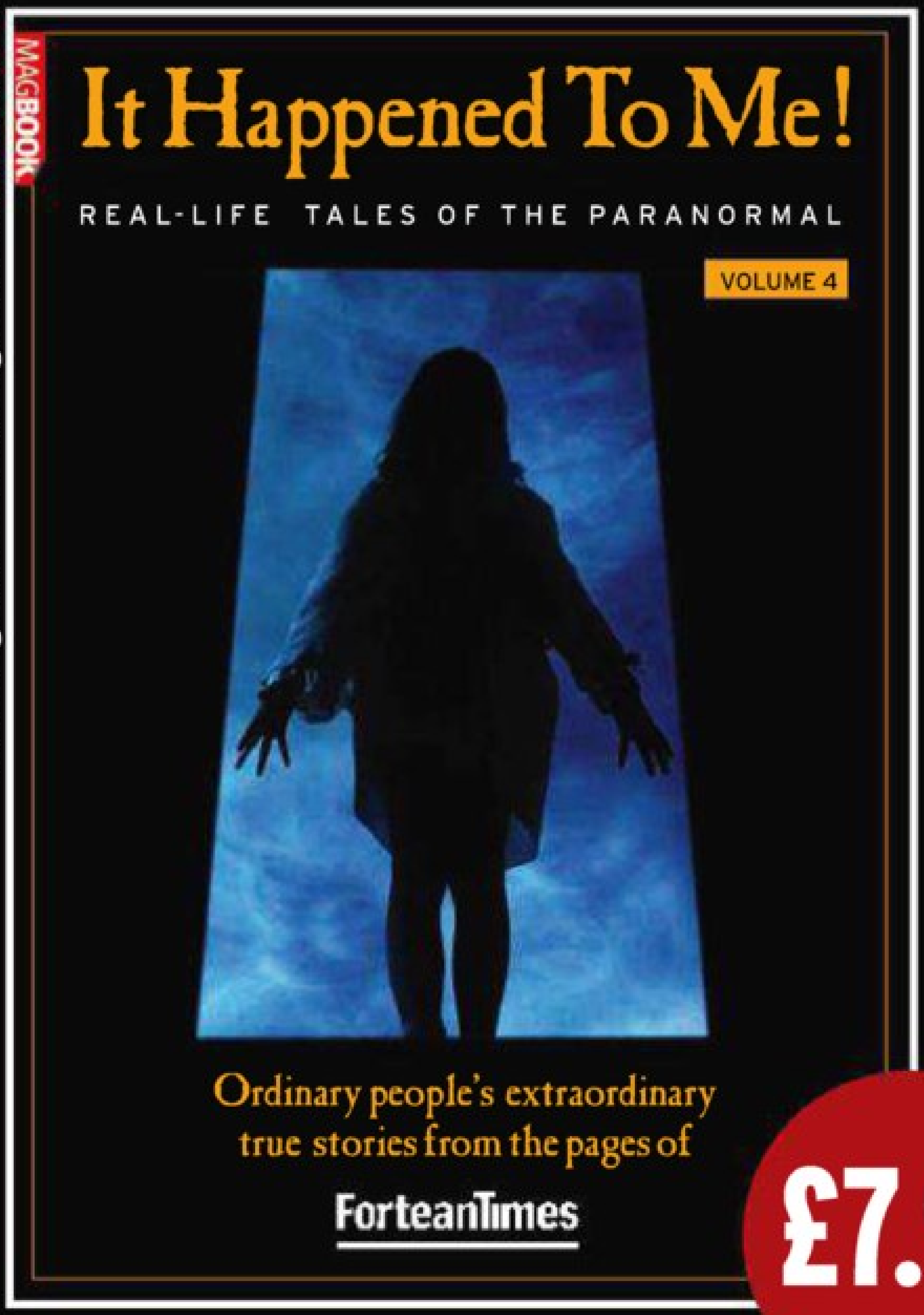

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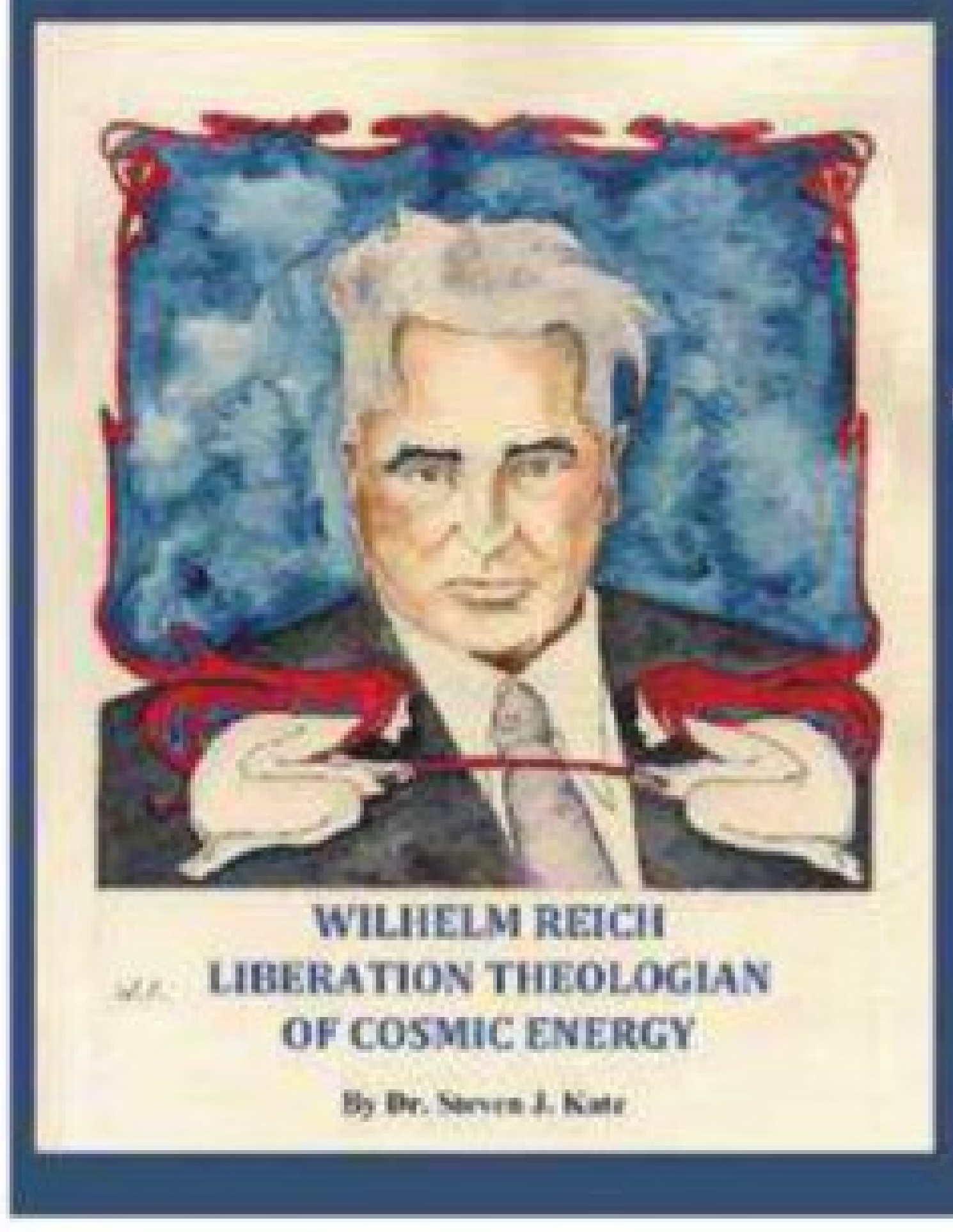

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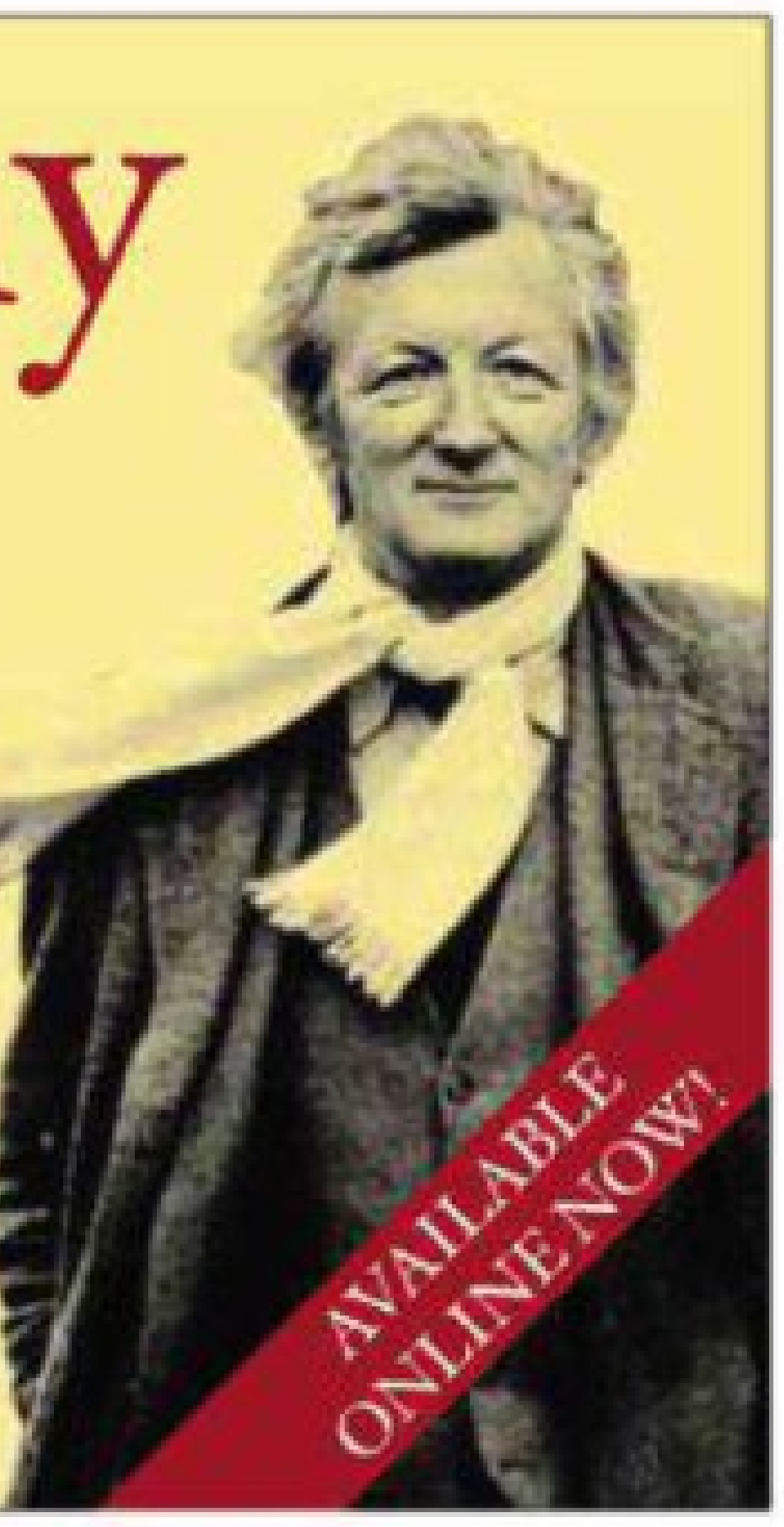
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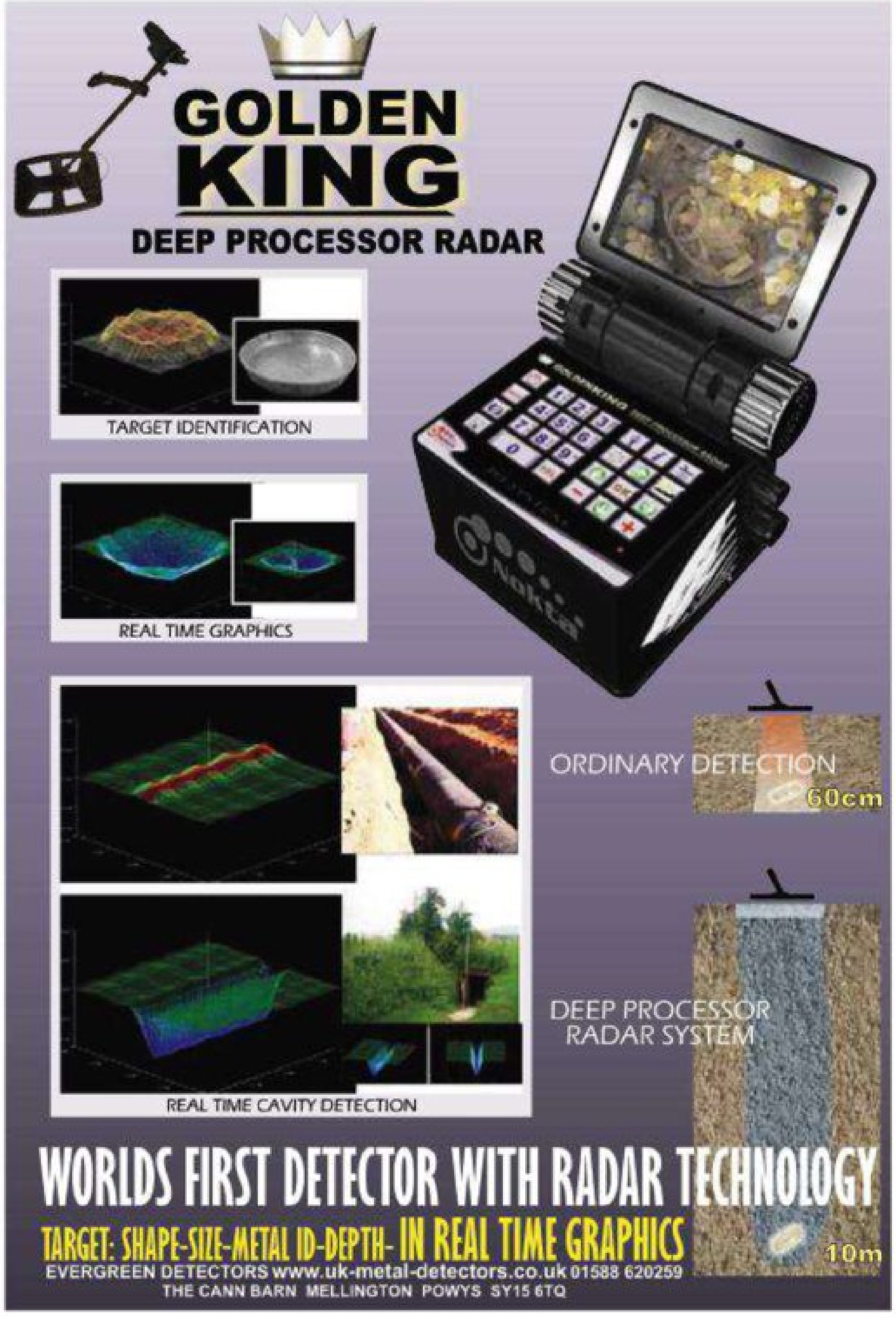

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Dear FT...

letters

Nazi Christianity

The Mystery of Mar Saba [**FT279:53**], about a Nazi plot "discrediting Christianity in the cause of propaganda against the British", was evidently part of a *British* plot to discredit the Nazis by making them out to be anti-Christian.

According to its constitution, the Nazi party was "Christian, but not favouring any particular denomination". One of the first Chancery Statutes, proclaimed on the very day that Hitler became sole lawmaker by the Enabling Act, was to prohibit the existence of atheist societies, and two weeks later Hitler made a speech prohibiting secular schools, on the ground that morality without religion has no foundation. Himself a fervent Christian, he wrote that Christ was crucified because He offended the Jews by driving the moneychangers from the Temple.

Donald Rooum
London

Harry and the fan belt

I was very interested to see the letter regarding children with learning disabilities who sometimes seem to have foreknowledge of events [**FT279:74**]. My son Harry (who is now 17) has profound and multiple learning disabilities, together with a phenomenal memory; most people who meet him say he reminds them of the Dustin Hoffman character in *Rain Man*. He has some degree of hearing loss and is on the autistic spectrum as well as having a small section of unidentified extra chromosomes in most of his cells.

There have been many instances of his "predicting" events over the years. One of the most memorable was the morning he claimed that his school bus needed a new fan belt. The driver assured him that it was OK, and there was none of the awful screeching noise of a slipping belt. Harry insisted that the belt was broken and got quite cross when the adults smilingly dismissed his warning. The next morning, however, the driver – looking rather shaken – came out to tell me that the bus had broken down the previous afternoon. You won't be surprised to learn that this was because the fan belt had snapped.

One of Harry's other talents is the ability to predict on what day of the week a particular date will fall. He has been able to do this ever since he could talk. By way of a small coincidence, in his book *Small Island* Bill Bryson describes a savant who could perform a similar feat and who was also called Harry.

Zoe Barkham
Gillingham, Kent

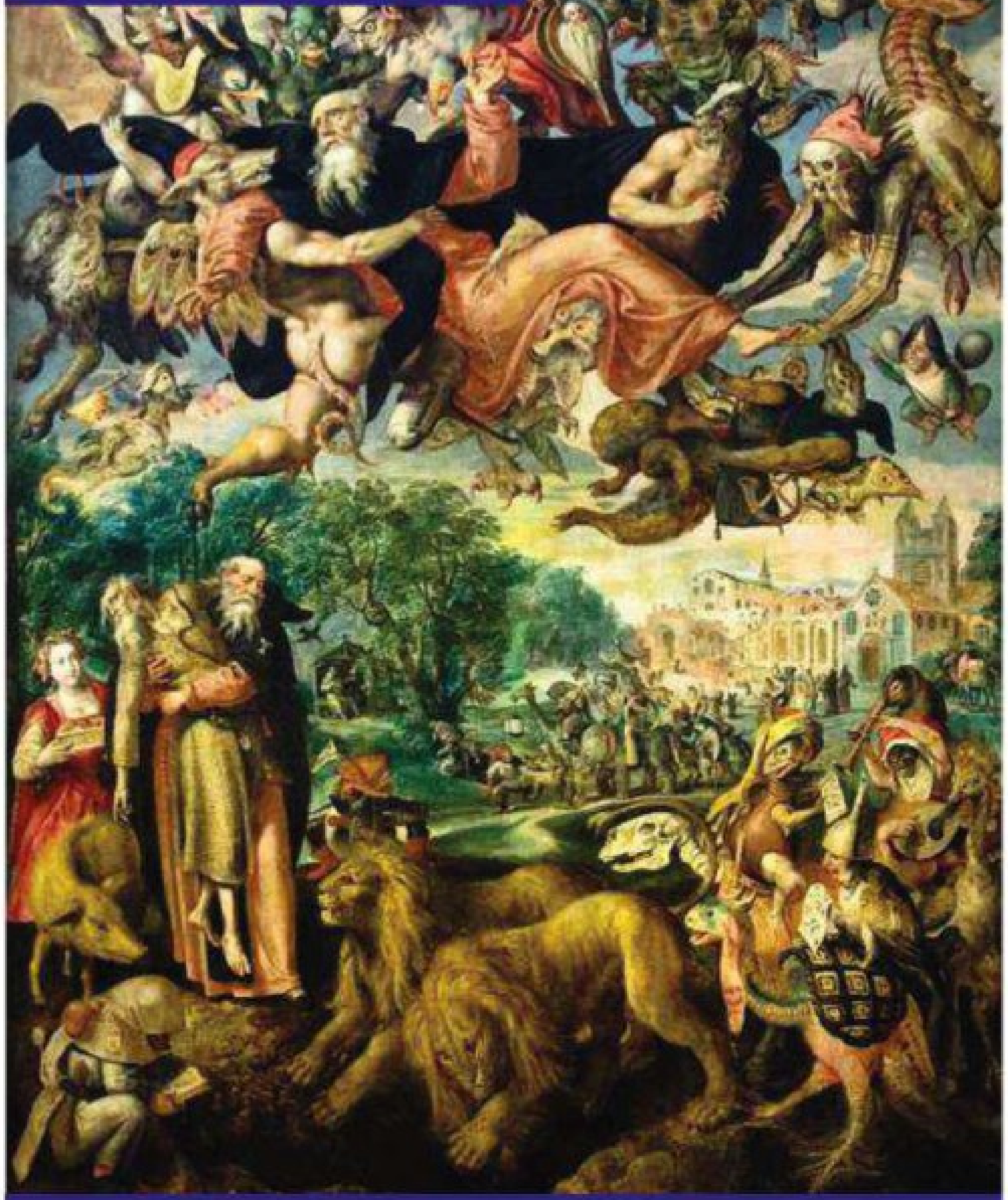
Calendar anomalies

Heribert Illig [**FT276:58**] thinks that three days went missing when Pope Gregory reformed the calendar, because he added 300 spurious years to history. It seems to me that there is a more plausible – though admittedly less exciting – explanation for the missing three days: Gregory XIII, or rather Luigi Lilio who devised the new calendar for him, assumed that in Julius Cæsar's time the Summer Solstice was on 21 June; but in fact it was held on 24 June, and in many places folk celebrations of midsummer are still held on that day. This would explain the 'missing' three days and would also account for the fact that Christmas Day, which is supposed to be at midwinter, is actually four days after the Solstice. (Four days and three days are not the same, but since the year has an odd number of days, there would have to be a discrepancy of one day when dividing into two halves.) Also, the Roman New Year was held on 25 March, which we may assume was then the Spring Equinox.

• A while ago, *FT* reproduced Aleister Crowley's drawing of LAM, with the comment that '49' appears in the bottom left corner [**FT231:42**]. This is not in fact a number, but the Tibetan characters for LAP, which is presumably the entity's real name.

Gareth J Medway
London

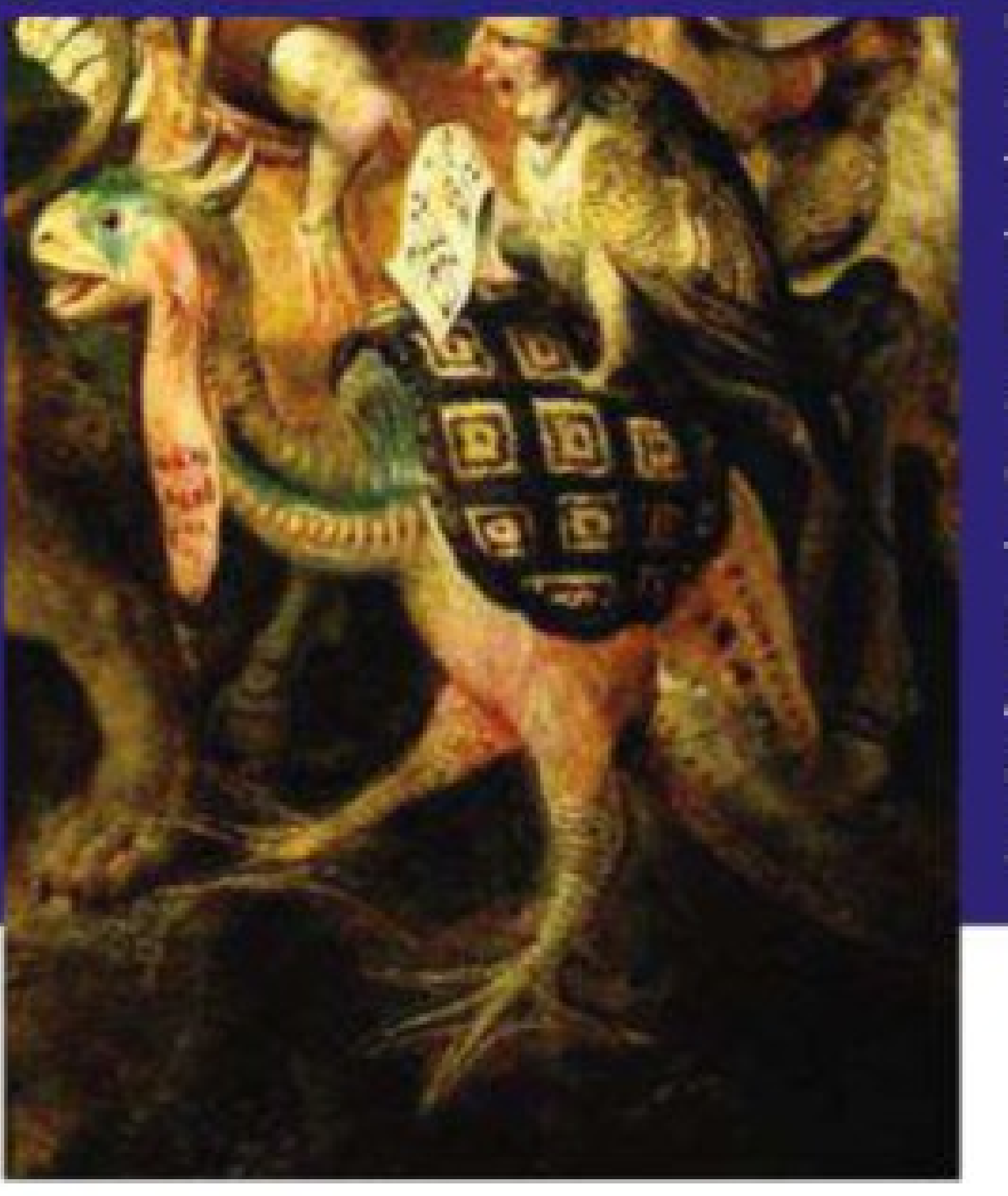
Accidental dinosaur?



At first glance, this strange animal (above at bottom right and below) looks like a small theropod dinosaur – or at any rate, a rather cartoony caricature of one. Admittedly, it has some undinosaurlike features such as horns and long droopy ears, and it doesn't appear to have any forelimbs… but with its thick tail, birdlike legs and reptilian head it looks more like a dinosaur than anything else. The problem is, the picture dates from the 16th century, long before dinosaurs were first reconstructed from fossilised bones. It's a detail from "The Temptation of Saint Anthony" by Marten de Vos (1532–1603), now in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp.

According to legend, Saint Anthony was tempted in the desert – not by Satan or some other solitary tempter, but by a whole host of demons of various shapes. This has made the subject a perennial favourite with artists, since it allows their imagination to run free in the depiction of the demons. Marten de Vos probably meant this demon to be a cross between a bird and a couple of other animals – though I can't imagine what.

Andrew May
Crewkerne, Somerset



letters

Wrong reign?

In his feature "The Ghosts of Versailles – An Adventure in Time" [**FT278:30–35**], I am surprised that Tom Heywood didn't mention Guy W Lambert's works on the Trianon case. The latter shows that the two protagonists of *An Adventure* didn't see items existing in 1789 such as the belvedere, the "jeu de bague". Moreover, the gardeners' greenish livery is that of Louis XV, not Louis XVI. On the contrary, they did see items not existing in 1789 scenery: the kiosk, a small house, a rock in the road, a range of trees, and the chapel door. The conclusion is that Moberly and Jourdain's vision corresponds to the Trianon's configuration in 1774, the year of Louis XV's death. The drawing lady can't consequently be Marie-Antoinette. Since the author didn't mention these researches, nor R Amadou's remarkable synthesis in *Les fantômes du Trianon* (Monaco, ed. Du Rocher, 1978), I'm afraid his survey of the case is found wanting.

Francis Gandon
By email

Wrong paternity

To correct a detail in the obituary for Henrietta Llewellyn Davies [**FT279:26**]: she was the illegitimate daughter of Lionel Birch, not Tom Hopkinson, the editor of *Picture Post*. It was Birch – a photographic contributor to *Picture Post* – who was known as "Britain's most married man".

Peter Hogan
Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Holy lake monsters

A few years ago, I published a study of lake monster sightings in Israel, that is, in the Dead Sea, the River Jordan, and Lake Tiberias. There are quite a large number of these, mostly from the Dead Sea, where mediæval pilgrims described serpents of hell raising their dragon heads – no doubt equating this salty body of water with an entrance to Satan's realms.

But one, interestingly, is told in an apocryphal and modern gospel, "The Great Gospel of John", a 10-volume, verbose account of Christ's life channelled by the Graz mystic Jakob Lorber (1800–1864) directly from Jesus (sadly missing from the side panel of modern gospels, **FT279:54**). Book 6, chapter 62, tells how Jesus and the disciples see a giant sea serpent in Lake Tiberias twice, and Jesus tells them it is a monster that was trapped in the lake when the waters of the Deluge retreated. Lorber's new gospel is quite popular in esoteric Christianity in Germany.

Regarding Jerusalem leys [**FT279:44**], a study of some of these and what the Talmud and Quran have to say about alignments in the holy city can be found in the chapter "Religion, Leys And Sacred Landscapes" in my recent book *Investigating the Impossible* (Anomalist Books 2011).

Karl Shuker unintentionally rounds up the Old Testament themes in his piece on mystery Indonesian beasts when he mentions the babirusa [**FT279:59**]. This was actually suggested as a kosher pig for Jews in 1984 by Professor Fuller Bazer of Florida University – and accepted as such by Rabbi Isaiah Zeidin of Bel Air, California, in November 1984 (if we believe the papers). The reason was that the babirusa has cloven hoofs but chews the cud. This would make it kosher.

Regarding "Madonna Mania" [**FT279:32–37**]: for an earlier instance of the same, the bleeding statues of Templemore in 1920, and the excitement that they created, see Fort, *Lo!* chapter 6 [pp585–589 in Dover edition].

"There is nothing new under the Sun." (*Ecclesiastes* 1:9)

Ulrich Magin
Leinfelden-Echterdingen, Germany

Fathomless complexities

As a bone of contention, fluoridation [**FT273:14**] might seem less likely than "the face that launch'd a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium". Yet whatever strange psychology may fuel a controversy that assiduously avoids resolving whether fluoridation is good, bad, or perhaps a bit of both, surely rivals for oddity such mind sets as motivated the recent "birther" imbroglio [regarding Obama's place of birth] and have kept confounding hopes of coping with the possible perils of AGW (anthropogenic global warming).

Similarly non-rational forces typically warp debate on evolution, whose fathomless complexities, it is somehow presumed, must needs submit to "explanatory power" – including simplistic religious varieties – despite scientific admissions that "biology is harder than physics", surely true as regarding its evolutionary fourth dimension. Indeed, the late Loren Eiseley, author of the acclaimed *Darwin's Century* he was commissioned to write for the 1959 Darwin centennial, noted how attempts to grasp theoretically the enormous evolutionary process have often wallowed in murky regions of belief and opinion. Thus while Darwin himself was "too intelligent" not to recognise difficulties confronting his theory, he tried to finesse or bypass such "can't-get-there-from-here" type of problems that are especially rife in biology and persistently haunt the horizons of human understanding.

The origins of exquisitely coordinated internal organisation and the precisely interactive choreography of intracellular and metabolic mechanisms, for example, are hardly resolved under the broad umbrella of Natural Selection. Nor could Darwin ignore cases involving "a variation which demands simultaneous alterations in other parts in order to be successful". For example, the instinctive ability of archerfish to bring down insect prey perched on weeds above its head by accurately spitting a drop of water had to have co-evolved along with its highly specialised anatomical features. Hence Darwin fell back on "referring to a 'mysterious law of correlation'", as if to whistle away the host of baffling natural mysteries that clearly subvert all pretence at "figuring out the Universe". To be sure, endeavour in that direction has provided tangible gifts (like the antibiotics that possibly saved my own life in childhood), yet the endless voyage of scientific discovery often "only expands the frontiers of our ignorance" as the late John Maddox, former editor of *Nature*, wrote in a *NY Times* essay.

Finally, where climate change Cassandras (who warn that unrestrained fossil fuelled "business-as-usual" could lead to the dire Venus Syndrome) clash with climate change contrarians, concerns have yet to focus on a disaster perhaps already unfolding. The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program has found that melting of the Greenland ice cap has accelerated sufficiently to overwhelm a UN panel projection that oceans will rise by 7–23in (18–58cm) by 2100, the AMAP's more worrisome estimate being 3–5ft (90–152cm) instead. And of course the pace of melting could accelerate further while the process will doubtless continue indefinitely and at both poles (the report did not assess the Antarctic). Apparently, the UN panel neglected feedback from an annually progressive shrinkage of solar-reflecting, floating summer ice, with consequent greater warming of Arctic seas and thereby swifter decay of the permanent ice.

Meanwhile, fluoridation proponents ignore some key points. For example, it only helps by strengthening the growing teeth of children but cannot benefit adults. Adult teeth, my current dentist claims, need clinical fluoride applications or a bothersome brushing three times a day with prescription-strength fluoride toothpaste that is not rinsed off for half an hour (thus relegating to the limbo of "magical thinking" the supposed efficacy of ordinary fluoride toothpaste as normally used). And mind-control theories have seized upon fluorine being part of formulæ for tranquillisers like Prozac. All in all, the entire controversy has epitomised typically subjective, opinionated thinking on vital issues (like AGW) that by rights should call for the hard-edged impersonal logic of a *Star Trek* android.

Nonetheless, my own anxieties about fluoridation, that also resonated with a long-standing dread of toxic chemicals and were further aggravated by anti-fluoride programmes presented by "Roy of Hollywood" on his LA radio broadcast “Something’s Happening”, have mostly fallen away as passing years only bring nearer a personal *Appointment in Samarra* that will probably not be fast-forwarded by fluoridation. Furthermore, especially for card-carrying enviro-paranoids, there’s bigger stuff to worry about.

So here’s one, also perhaps a test for precognitive dreams but an event both reason and hope tell me cannot happen – namely, the reactivation of Mt Shasta, a currently dormant volcano on or near the Pacific “Ring of Fire” in California. The only reason for expecting such an occurrence is that it happened in my dreams over a year ago, and was later predicted in a printed message appearing in a later, quite recent dream. Mt Shasta shows no sign of being ready to erupt; yet its dormancy provides good reason for hoping that these dreams were not predictive. For should any dormant volcano come back to life, that might well occur in conjunction with larger geophysical upheaval on a broader scale and with global consequences. Thus, one hopes, both dreams were merely symbolic and of strictly subjective or “Jungian” meaning (for Shasta’s paranormal repute is enormous), but do not foretell or relate to such objectively dire events as some prophecies have warned could accompany a spiritual eruption of higher human consciousness.

Richard Porter
Denver, Colorado

Levels of credulity

“The Men in White Suits” by David Hambling [**FT276:16**] is interesting because it raises the problem of distinguishing between different flavours of bad science: namely the under- and over-credulous.

To deal with the overly credulous first: most of us learn rapidly that when something seems too good to be true, it usually is. We throw the “£1 million raffle ticket” away the moment it asks for an admin fee before we can collect it. Likewise, we need to check the miraculous prototype before we shell out. I firmly believe we should teach logic traps and thinking skills in schools. Because some scientists have been wrong about new inventions in the past doesn’t mean all scientists will be wrong about all inventions in the future.

Likewise, the alarm bell should ring the moment you hear “it must be…” or similar. Assuming that the Fleischmann-Pons tubes did produce more energy (**FT172:14; 277:14**) than went into them, how did they know that it was down to cold fusion as opposed to quantum entanglement, pyrokinetic microbes, or indeed Tesla’s famous beamed power?

This highlights another feature of bad science: half-science. This usually involves appropriating a buzzword known to lay people (fusion, quantum) while ignoring the inconvenient actual science that comes with it, such as the fact that if they really were generating fusion, they would have got radiation poisoning. (Despite producing less, and less bad waste, fusion still emits radiation when running). Now *that* might make people reach for their chequebooks!

And now to the rather more depressing *under*-credulous science. When paradigms shift, the old guard – despite being nominally committed to truth and evidence – often will never accept it. As Max Planck said, “A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”[1] This happened with Einstein’s relativity (without which satnavs, for example, would *never* get it right).

I would like to think that if the Emdrive (**FT201:14**)does produce thrust (I really hope it does, but that very hope might skew my judgement) then this would be recognised by lab testing, despite the lack of theoretical explanation. However, there is the infamous case of the paradoxical freezing (the Mpemba effect). If you put beakers of warm and cold water in your freezer, then I am told the warm water will sometimes ice over first. This is of course against common sense and most understanding of science. When a lab tech was asked how his experimental checking of this went, he allegedly replied “I’ll keep on repeating the experiment until I get the *right* result.”[2]

I suspect the main reason that deserving inventions fail is more of the Starlite variety [**FT276:40–44**], or as illustrated by the horrendous experiences of James Dyson with his vortex cleaner – namely human stupidity, greed and power politics. Any Brit with an invention would be well advised to go to Japan or Germany.

Meanwhile I urge everyone to equip their brains, and take nobody’s word for anything. Me, I am off to put warm and cold water in my freezer.

NOTES

[1] Quoted in Thomas Kuhn: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970 ed.), p150.

[2] www.thecolourblue.co.uk/mpemba.shtml (my italics).

James A Tuker
By email

Ian Simmons responds: The Mpemba effect is pretty easily demonstrated – *New Scientist* recommends starting with beakers of water at 5°C (41°F) and 35°C (95°F). There are several competing and equally plausible explanations that no one has investigated in sufficient depth to differentiate, complicated by the fact that experimenters have used different definitions of freezing, and that several or all of the competing explanations might cause the effect depending on the conditions at the time. What’s more, it might involve lots of variables that are difficult to control independently, making it very difficult to pin down to any one specific cause. Vexing, but not really contradictory to science, and as for common sense an awful lot of science contradicts common sense.

Mr Tuker is wrong about Cold Fusion. The reason Fleishmann and Pons concluded that their extra energy was from fusion rather than any of these other sources was that their fusion experiment did indeed emit radiation and leave behind fusion products. Their tubes emitted neutrons during the experiment, which wouldn’t happen in chemical reactions, but was consistent with fusion, and they detected tritium in the reaction vessel afterwards, which is a fusion by-product. The problem with cold fusion’s acceptance has been that subsequently no one has been able to produce the same results consistently, so it is difficult to demonstrate conclusively what is going on, let alone do anything useful with it.

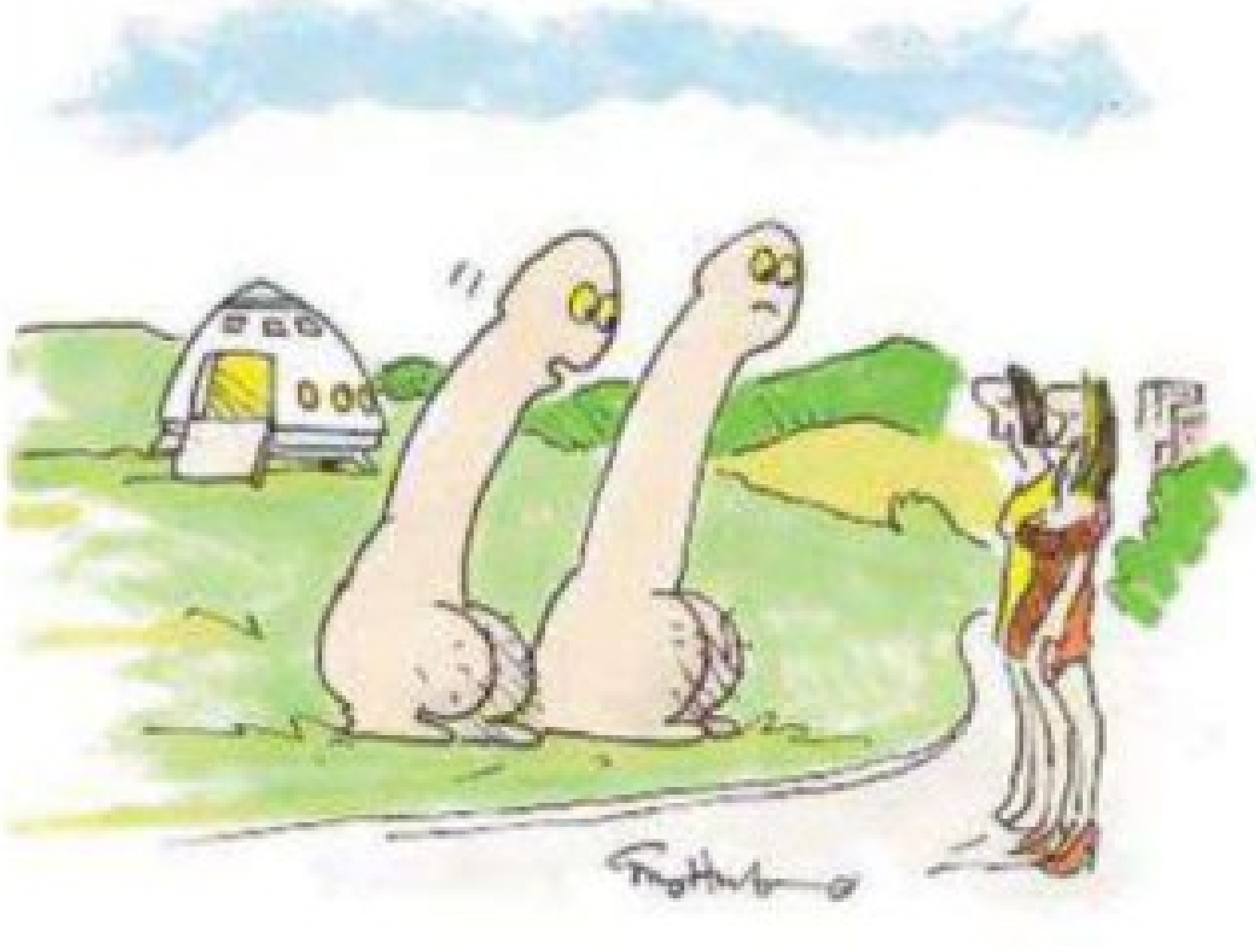
Mr Tuker assumes that the release of any radiation from the experiment would automatically result in radiation poisoning; however, one can receive surprisingly high levels of radiation without succumbing, and in the case of cold fusion, the alleged elevation in neutrons was minuscule, enough to be statistically significant, but nowhere near enough to pose a threat to health. They would have got more extra radiation from a visit to a granitic area of the country (for instance in Cornwall) for a few days than from all the output of their experiments.

Mr Tuker has a point about under- and over-credulous science, but for my money something like string theory is a far better example of over-credulity in science: it can’t be experimentally verified, but the theorists are seduced by the pretty maths.

University challenge

There was a question about Charles Fort in the television quiz show *University Challenge* (8 August 2011: Christ Church, Oxford v. University of Bath). Jeremy Paxman described him in characteristically sneering tones as “The American paranormalist Charles Fort”, and the question was correctly answered by one of the Oxford team: “Teleportation”.

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire



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Pram turns a corner

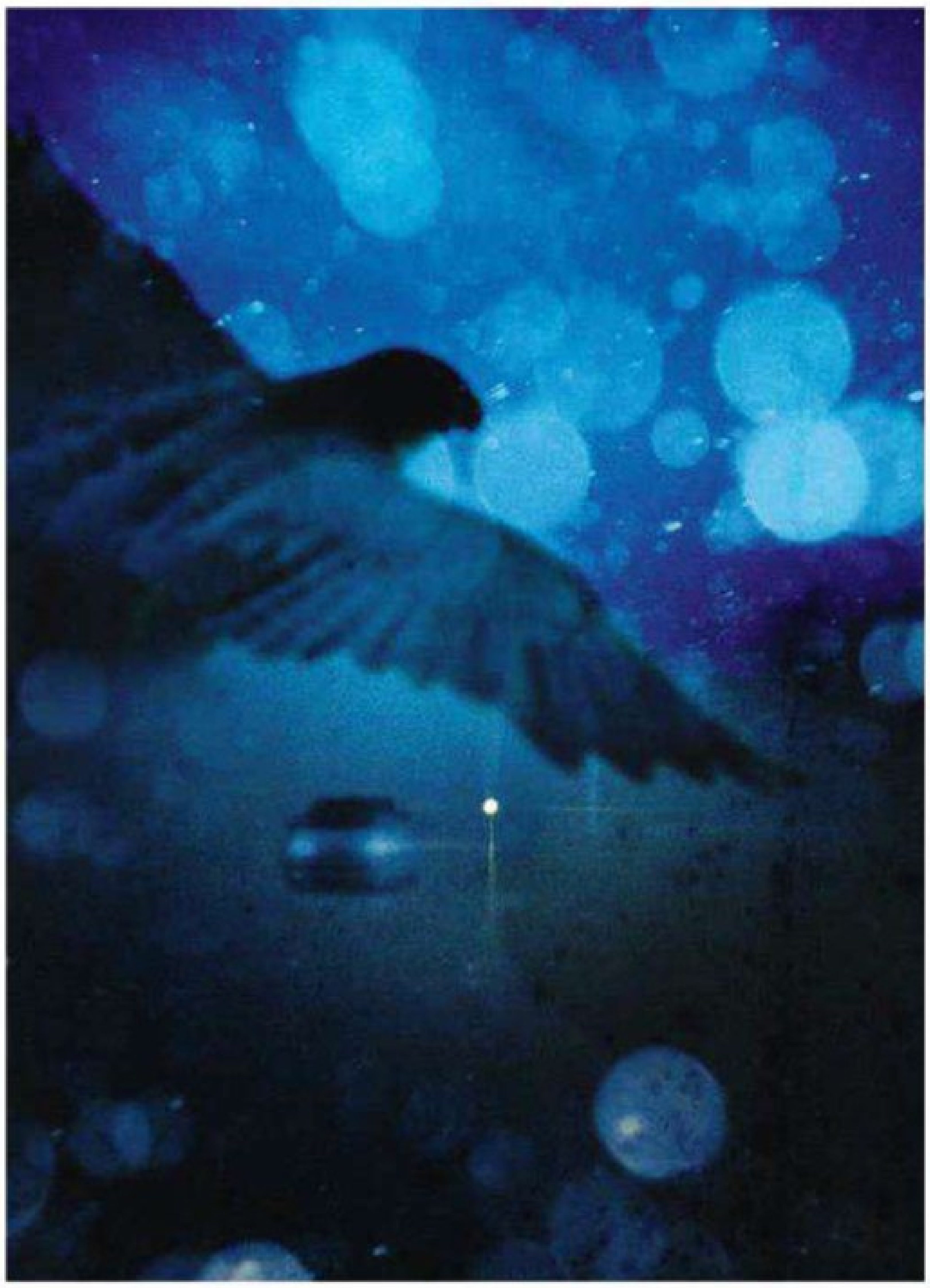
A friend and I witnessed the following bizarre event when we were in Marland Hill Primary School in Rochdale, Lancashire, in the early 1990s. The main entrance was surrounded by a concrete football pitch and a descending grass verge which, after a wooden fence, led onto Roch Mills Crescent. The day and time escape me – presumably sometime in the afternoon after lunch – but I do remember that both of us were standing on the edge of the football pitch by the grass verge overlooking the Crescent. I can't recall what we were discussing, but it must have been important to me as despite my friend's desperation to have me look across the road I wouldn't stop talking and do so until he swore at me. While the event didn't last very long, I remember time seeming to drag as I tried to make sense of it.

When I turned to look at Roch Mills Crescent, I saw an old-fashioned blue pram, the material ripped and worn, its hood raised, moving rapidly down the middle of the road. My first instinct was to look for the mother who was presumably chasing after it, but there was no one on the road, leaving me worried that the pram and its presumed occupant would crash into the curb at the end of the road, causing a nasty injury. However, as the pram reached the end of the road, it quite smoothly turned the corner and carried on out of sight.

This ludicrous and surreal event left us strangely unnerved and played on our minds for some time. What now seems odd, aside from the obvious, is that no one else on the football pitch appeared to have seen it. Secondly, the tattered nature of the pram makes me think that it was a vintage one, unlikely to have been in use around 1994. Lastly, it was the stillness of the street that gave the whole incident an eerie feeling – as I said, no one was around on the street to have either pushed or chased after it.

My friend and I have had irregular contact in subsequent years, but each time we meet the story is mentioned by one of us just as a way of validating that we did see this and that one of us hadn't made it up. I did think for a while that it might have been a prank, a remote-control pram as it were, but this seems as fantastical as something paranormal. I mean, why go to so much trouble to rig a pram with a remote control only to try it out on a quiet road with only schoolchildren to act as gullible rubes? I would love to hear of any other "paranormal pram" stories if they're out there!

Michael Byrne
London



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

The 9/11 bird

On the morning of 11 September 2001, I was driving a van past a lough in Northern Ireland. [Mr Jones names the lough as "Stranear Loch", but we can't locate this – editor]. It was a section of road that had a low wall by it. To my utter amazement I saw a *huge* eagle-like bird sitting on a haystack. Honestly, this thing was enormous, with its black wings spread out. I couldn't stop, due to traffic behind me. I did have my camera and now regret not taking a picture. It was only when I got north of Belfast that I learned about the terrorist attack on New York from a tea stall owner. It was months before I realised that the *time* I saw the huge bird roughly coincided with the attack. Could it have been some kind of symbolic psychic projection, perhaps the Thunderbird that Native Americans used to see or the iconic eagle used as a US national symbol? The RSPB told me it was a sea eagle, but it was much too big for that; it had the wingspan of a small plane or glider.

David Jones
Bangor, Gwynedd

Sheffield 'time-slip'

I had an experience that could have ended up being the British equivalent of the Ghosts of Versailles [**FT278:30–35**]. In the 1990s, I was lecturing at Sheffield Hallam University and living opposite the General Cemetery. Opened in 1836, this was the main burial ground of Victorian Sheffield and is awash with Greek Doric and Egyptian-style tombs.

One morning while walking through the cemetery on my way to work, I was brought up short by the sight of a woman dressed in Victorian mourning dress. She was deep in conversation with a man wearing Victorian tailoring and a top hat. Feverishly, my mind tried to make sense of what I was seeing. I even closed my eyes to see if the two figures would disappear when I reopened them – they didn't. Within seconds, I was already thinking in terms of ghosts or a time-slip, and if I hadn't gritted my teeth and kept walking towards the couple I am sure this is the explanation I would have come to.

However, as I got closer another woman appeared and approached the two figures. She was dressed in modern-day clothing and was holding a clipboard. The sight of a camera led to a paradigm shift in my understanding of what I was seeing. When I reached the two Victorian figures, who were very much flesh and blood, I said: "You have just nearly given me a heart attack!" They laughed and explained they were making an amateur film about the cemetery.

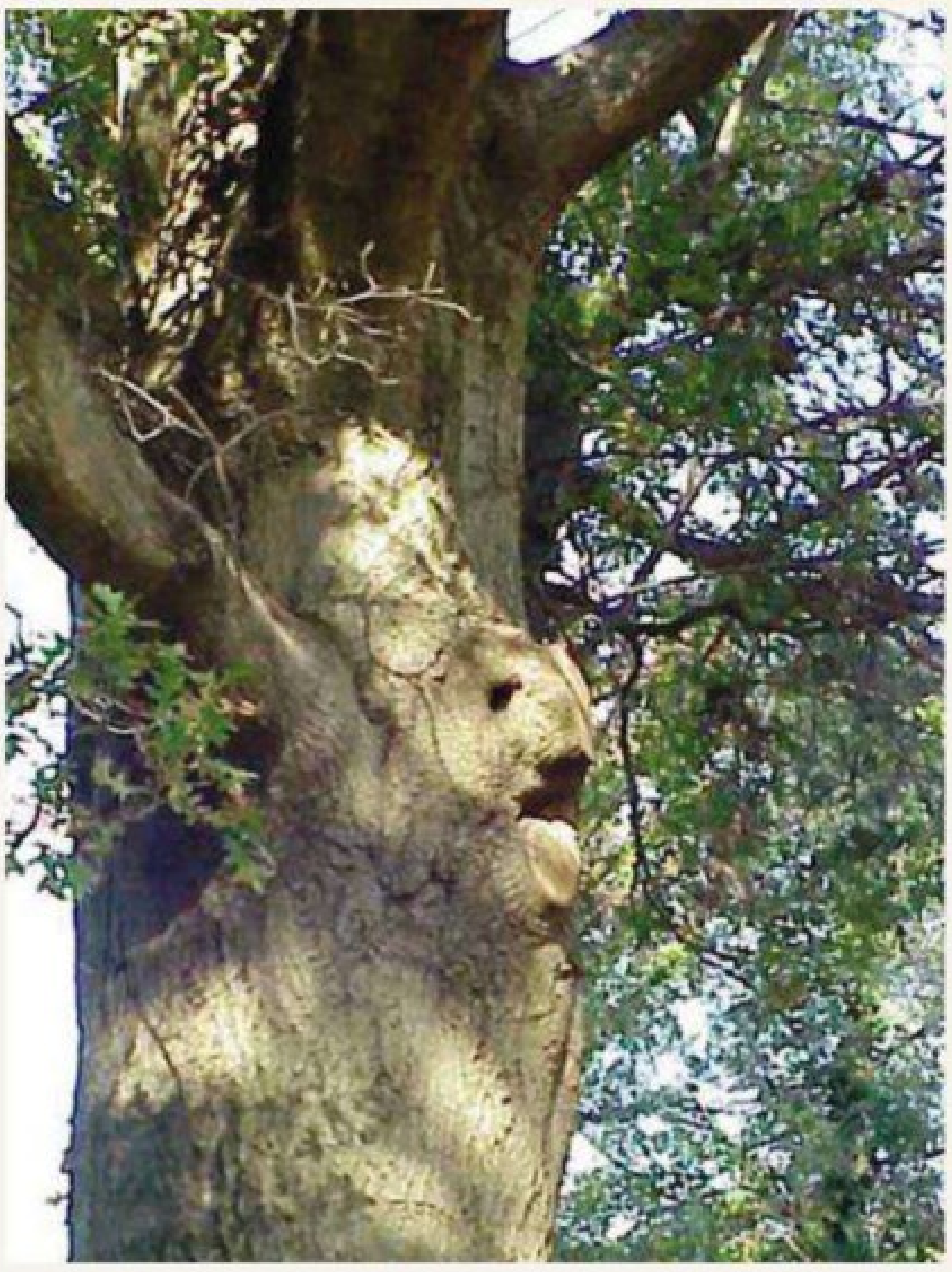
There are several things I gathered from this experience, which I think may have a bearing on the Ghosts of Versailles story. Firstly, like the Misses Moberly and Jourdain, I already knew a lot about the location. In fact, I used the cemetery as a teaching aid in lectures, so was already 'primed' with a historical context into which I could fit the two apparently anomalous figures. Secondly, as someone with an interest in strange phenomena, I was also predisposed to consider a supernatural explanation and my mind brought the categories of 'ghosts' and 'time-slip' almost immediately to the top of my 'possible definitions' list. Finally, if I had not approached the 'Victorians' and had turned and headed in the other direction, I would probably have settled on the time-slip explanation and dined out on it ever since.

Paul Walker
Billingham, Cleveland

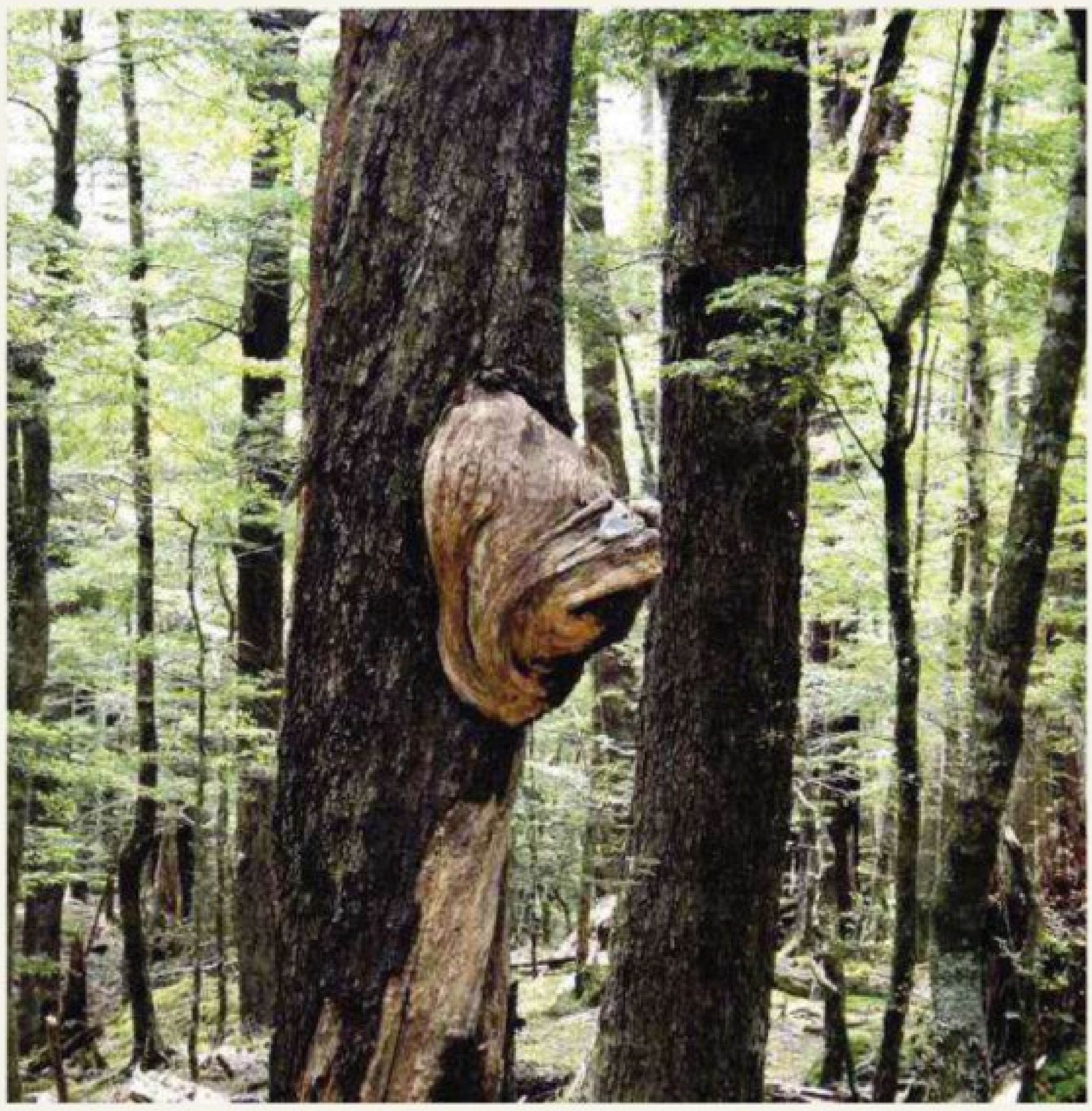
simulacra corner

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London, NW5 4NP, United Kingdom, or to sieveking@forteantimes.com. If your photo is published, we'll send you an exclusive *Fortean Times* gift.

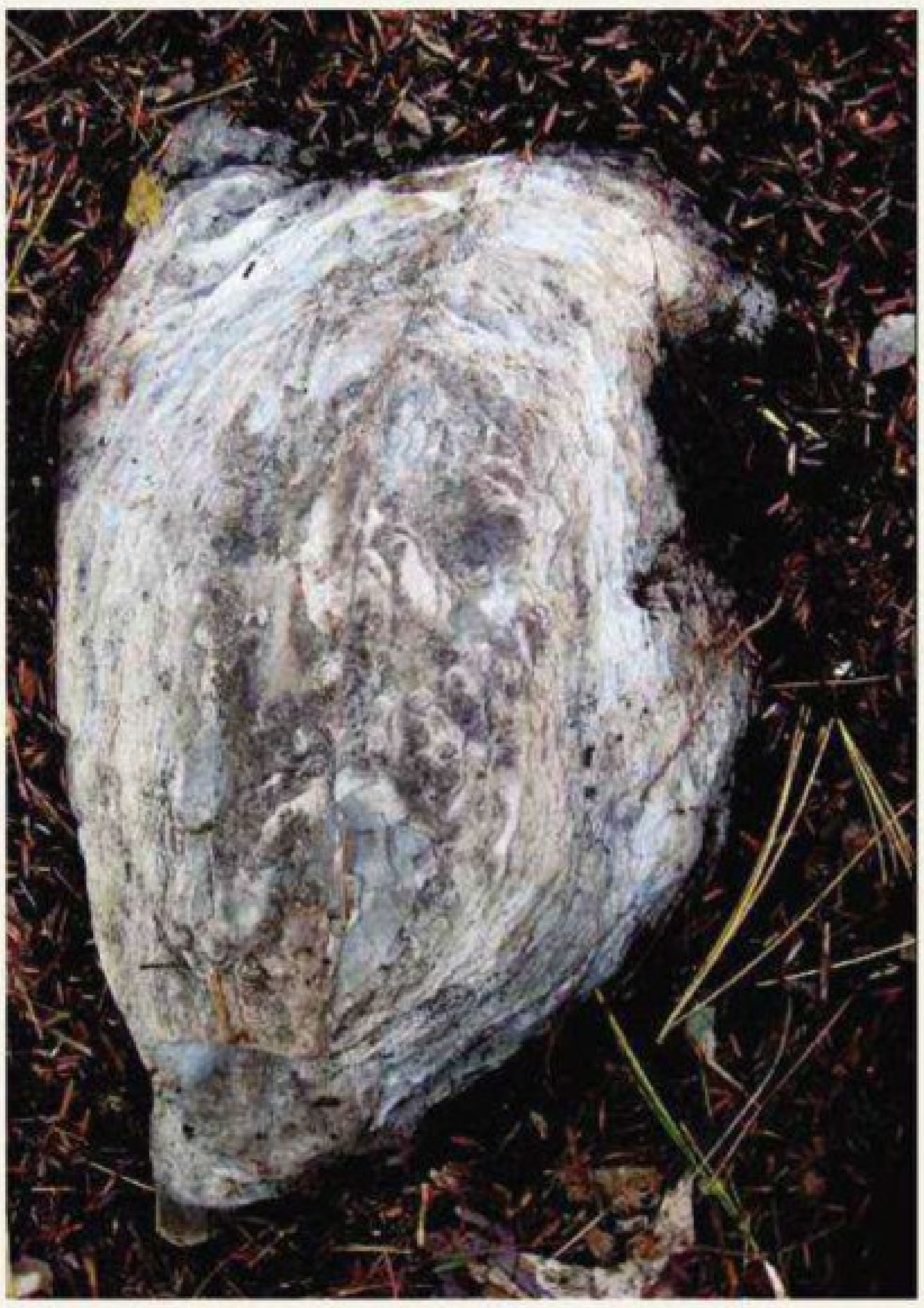
A selection of woodland faces sent in by FT's observant readers.

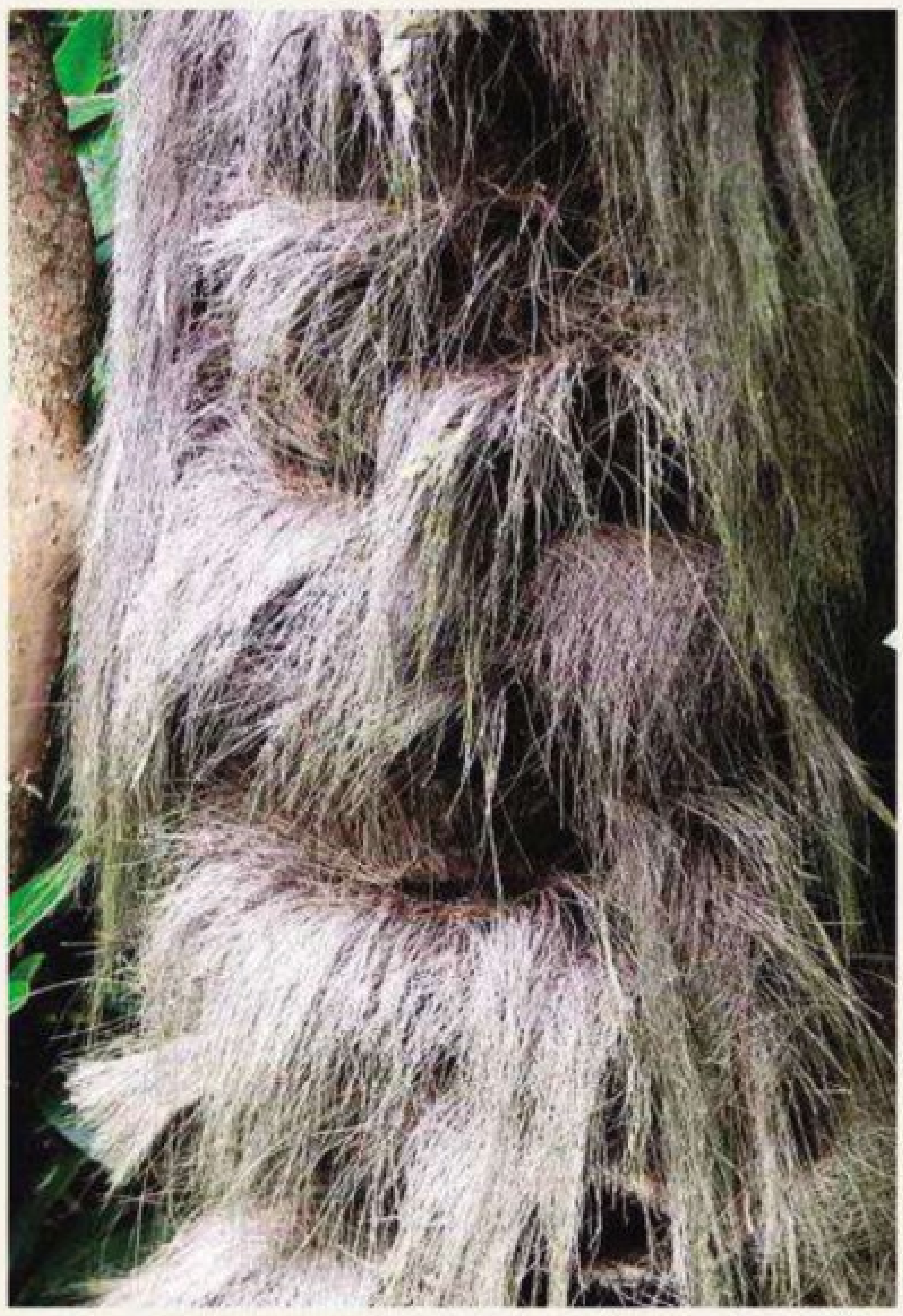


A tree face photographed along the George Washington Parkway in Virginia across from Washington DC by Tom Rickert.



Pete Swindells took this photograph of "Grandpa Simpson" on a tree near Sylvan Lake, Glenorchy, New Zealand, last November.





FAR LEFT: Melissa Meader took this photo on a short hike on French's Mountain in the Belgrade lakes region of Maine. At first, she thought it was burl wood, but studying the photograph later she decided it might be stone. She comments: "My party and I saw this as an image of Christ the Martyr, appearing perhaps briefly as the snows will soon blanket New England and send Him once more into his wintry tomb."

LEFT: Jon Watkins spotted this hairy creature in undergrowth at Heligan Gardens in Cornwall, and wondered if it was a Jim Henson creation.

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

76. Kuelap, Peru

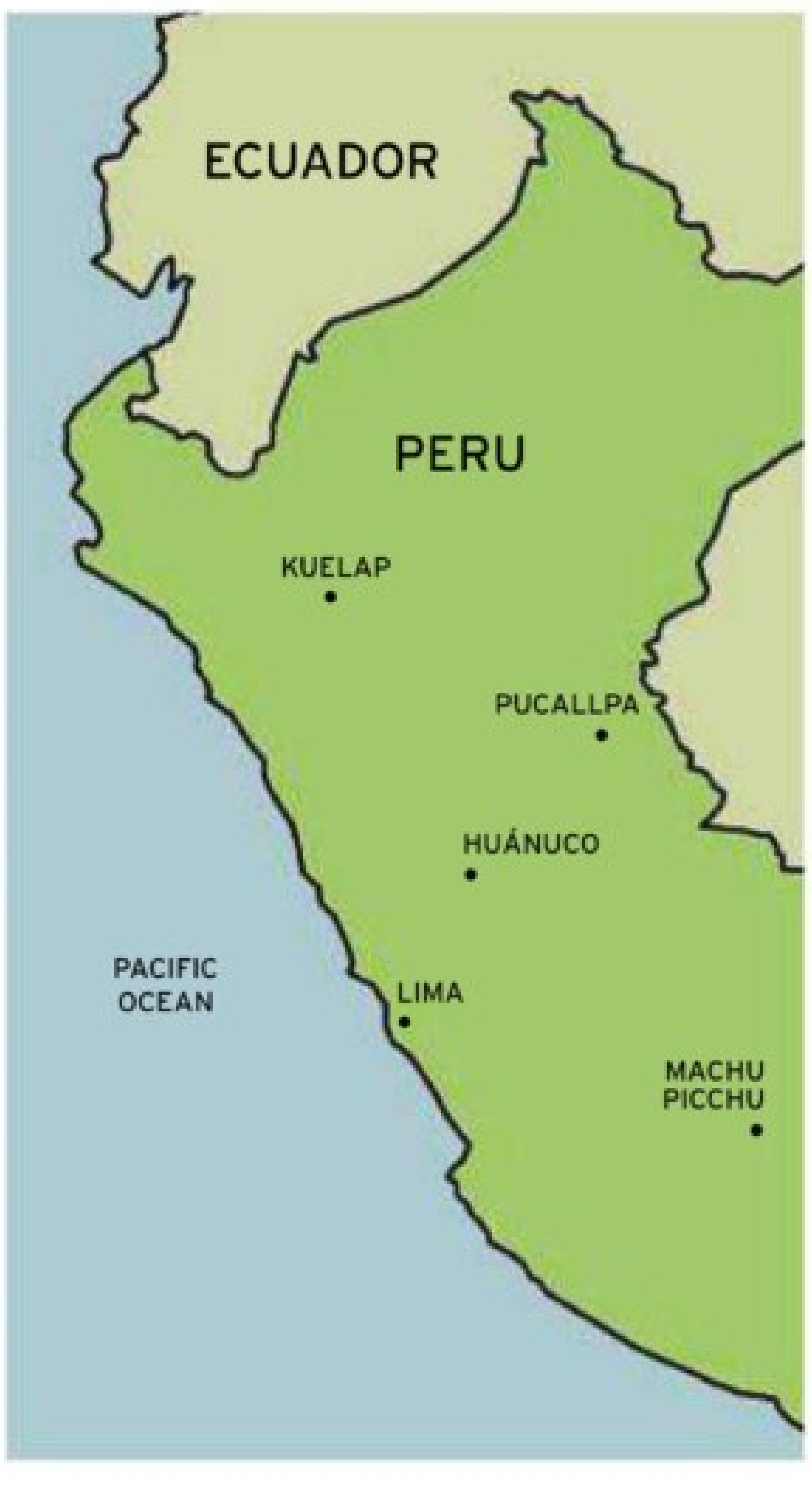
JEN OGILVIE explores the Lost City of the Cloud People, a forgotten citadel perched between Andean civilisation and the wilds of Amazonia.

JEN OGILVIE

ABOVE: The massive walls of the Kuelap citadel meet the clouds.

A hundred years ago, Hiram Bingham 'discovered' Machu Picchu. The site stunned the world and, splashed over the pages of *National Geographic*, quickly became one of our most iconic wonders. But nearly 70 years before Bingham set up his camera in the Inca ruins, and far to the north, another lost city was quietly reclaimed from the jungle, one of the most awesome monuments in all the ancient Americas.

Kuelap was brought to the world's attention in 1843 by a local judge, Juan Crisóstomo Nieto, who was guided to the site by villagers while conducting a survey of the area. In a letter to a regional administrator, he wrote of its massive size, and as word got out a straggle of adventurers hacked their way through the vine-entangled forest to see for themselves. But the journey was perilous, and few made it. Tour parties still trundle round the country retreat of its Inca conquerors, but Kuelap rests undisturbed on its mountaintop, wrapped in sky and mystery.



Around Kuelap stretch the Amazonian Andes, a rugged, remote area of deep ravines and soaring precipices shrouded in cloud forest. It is the homeland of the Chachapoya, a people famed for their fierce warriors and powerful shamans, whose civilisation flourished from around AD 800 until the Inca victories of the 1470s. They lived as autonomous *ayllus* (extended kin groups), in circular houses clustered on high ridges. Remains of their distinctive settlements are scattered all over this vast region, and yet remarkably little is known about them. Already, by the time of the Spanish conquest, an air of exotic otherness hung about this people who lived perched on what seemed the edge of Andean civilisation, where wild Amazonia begins; the "Ceja de Selva", the eyebrow of the jungle. "These are the whitest and most graceful Indians in all the Indies," wrote Father Calancha, "and the women are the most beautiful." [1] Even our word for them is not their own, but an Inca name: Chachapoya, meaning cloud people.

Today's visitor may not need a machete, but Kuelap is still very definitely off the gringo trail: buses connecting the nearest town, Chachapoyas, with the rest of Peru are infrequent; rockfalls deposit boulders in the middle of roads; hairpin bends twist under gravity-mocking overhangs; violent rains make muddy tracks impassable. But the day we visit, the Sun is breaking through and the citadel can be seen from miles away, 3,000m (10,000ft) above sea level, gleaming on its cliff edge. As we wind towards it, first by car then on foot, there's a feeling of expansiveness. The path is embroidered with flowers, llamas nuzzle the grass, and, far below, cloud shadows scud through the Utcubamba Valley.

On the summit, the scale of the landscape and of Kuelap is overwhelming. The site is encased in a creamy, colossal wall – 20m / 65ft high in places – that stretches away along the ridge until it's lost in a knot of greenery. It wraps a six-hectare (15 acre) urban centre; the entire complex, including terraces, tombs and outlying settlements, is around 450 hectares (1,100 acres). Built out of big limestone blocks, the wall is blank but for a tall thin slit; we enter and are sucked up a narrowing corridor and out onto the citadel itself.

We emerge amid the low ruins of round houses, clinging together like burst bubbles on water. The forest has reasserted itself: roots break through walls, moss crawls over a guinea pig run, orchids and bromeliads burst from the vine-heavy trees that lean over pathways. Somewhere, a team of archæologists are muttering and scraping; otherwise it's just us and our guide. There are over 400 buildings up here, almost all of them circular and between 3m and 12m (10–40ft) in diameter, once home to a population of approximately 2,000. One has been restored, and with its thatched roof and impregnable, organic form, it gives you an idea of how this place must once have dominated the skyline, houses budding out along the ridge and clustering together against the elements.

The houses are organised into upper and lower sections, probably an expression of a traditional Andean moiety system. Access to the upper section is via another tapering, high-walled corridor, funnelling attackers up to be picked off one by one; some of the walls are shaped into what resemble parapets; and at the far end and highest point is a tower where 2,500 sling stones have been found, and which has a commanding view of the valley below.

Who was it, then, that the inhabitants of Kuelap were afraid of? Why did they build their citadel, and what purpose did it serve? No one knows. It may have been the stronghold of an unusually powerful local chief; some researchers have even argued that it was the political centre of a Chachapoya kingdom, although the evidence suggests Chachapoya society was fragmentary.[2] Alternatively, it could be that it was conceived as defence against the Wari, who were expanding north through the central highlands and along the coast. What is certain is that they must have been driven by something extraordinary, by a fear or ambition strong enough to unite fractious tribes and organise this mighty construction.

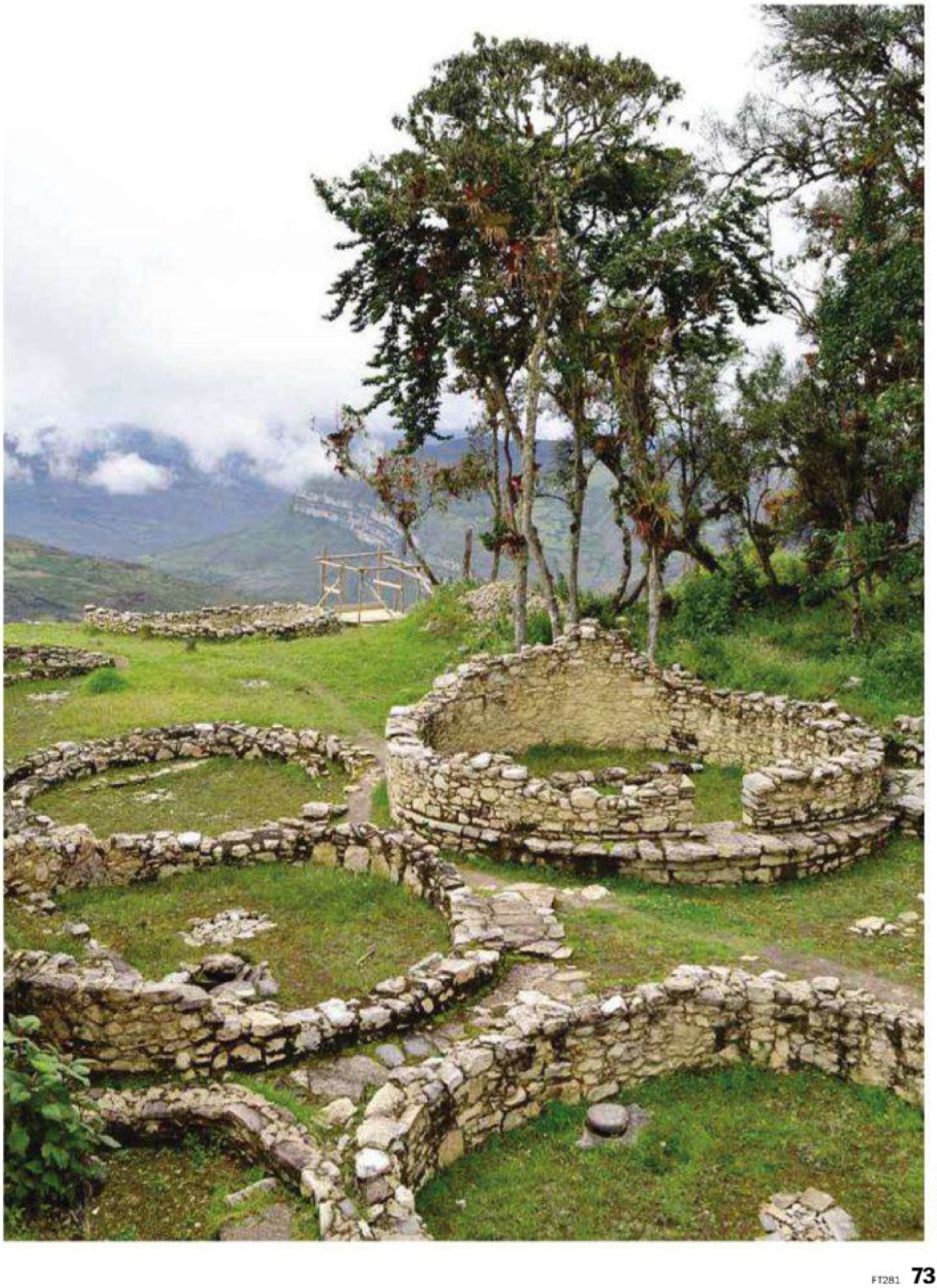
The Chachapoya were ferocious warriors, as the Inca found to their cost. Skulls found at Kuelap show evidence of scalp removal, though whether this was to take trophies or for medicinal reasons is not known. The Spanish were equally impressed by the reputation of the Chachapoya shamans. Juan Polo de Ondegardo wrote of their "great sorcerers and skilled herbalists who make poisons".[3] The numerous references to sorcerers and *brujos* in these early chronicles can in part be explained by the location of Chachapoyas: not only were there plentiful medicinal plants locally, but the region was situated at a crossroads on the trade route to the Amazon lowlands, an even greater pharmacopoeia mythologised as the source of primordial knowledge. Shamans from the Andes would travel to the lowlands to procure herbs and learn new techniques, or to serve apprenticeships with their more powerful Amazonian counterparts. Quartz crystals and rare metals have been found at Chachapoya sites at La Playa and Gran Pajatén, probably used in shamanic activities, and a number of skulls show evidence of trepanation, a process that could have been intended as a cure, or served some magical purpose.

However, Professor Warren Church, an archæologist and anthropologist who specialises in the region, is wary of reading too much into reports by the Spanish, which were often written by clerics with their own agendas. He points out that while the rise in hostile sorcery was probably greatest in Chachapoyas it occurred everywhere in the Andes during the Spanish conquest; just as throughout world history social and demographic upheavals have triggered increased outbreaks of witchcraft. The indigenous populations were being devastated by European diseases, and, "in the absence of modern Western disease theory, natives often attributed misfortunes to the hostile actions of rival kin groups. Old grievances rose to the surface as people took advantage of political and social chaos that accompanied the conquest to settle old scores."[4]

Low ruins of round houses cling together like bubbles

This chaos, and the imposition of the Inca solar cult, and then Spanish Christianity, destroyed the Chachapoya belief system. Any rituals, sacrificial practices or use of hallucinogens specific to the Chachapoya people are long forgotten. What we know of their art tells us little: while they were reputed to have been great weavers, their ceramics are plain and their buildings are decorated with geometric friezes. We know little of their gods and myths. They revered serpents, condors and lightning as cosmic forces. As well as these, archæologists have found representations of human-feline hybrids, presumably shamans transforming; of human heads, possibly signifying either ancestors or trophy heads taken in battle; and a range of fertility and cycle-of-life symbols.

There is no evidence of temples, although there is a strange structure at Kuelap, which, it seems, had spiritual significance. The Tintero ('inkpot') is a noseless upside-down cone containing a bottle-shaped vault; at the bottom, among a crush of Ecuadorian shells,



JEN OGILVIE

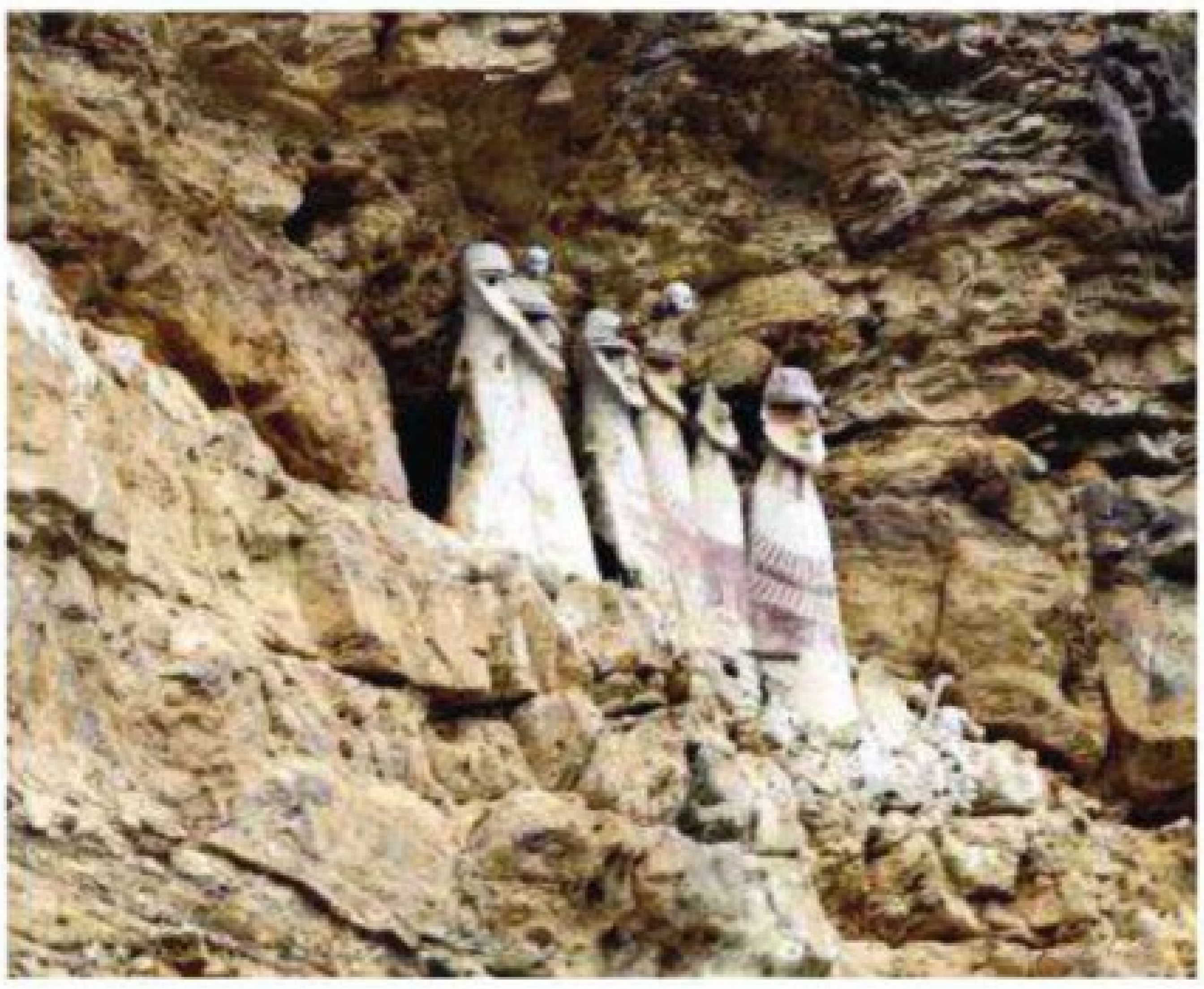
ABOVE: Remains of the circular buildings characteristic of the Chachapoyas culture.

is a slab of rock carved with three rounded grooves. Over the years, there has been a whole series of imaginative explanations for the Tintero – dungeon, water tank, mausoleum, storehouse – but Alfredo Narvaez, the archæologist who has been working on the site for decades now, believes it served some religious function. Offerings he has found on the top of the Tintero contain the bones of deer, llamas, and guinea pigs, and to the front he found ash, burned earth and cooked maize for *chicha* (corn beer), suggesting that the area was used for rituals. In 1996, a team from the San Diego Museum of Man studied the building and concluded that it was a solar calendrical observatory. They found that in early October and early March – important dates for local farmers – a sunbeam shines into the vault at a 90-degree angle; what's more, they noted that the shaft leading down into the vault is not vertical but tilted slightly, so that the Sun at noon on the day of the Winter Solstice shines down it and onto the stone block below. As well as the agricultural and ritual significance of the date, this beam of light may have represented the Axis Mundi; Kuelap as the microcosm, a central pillar around which the forces of the cosmos move.[5]

One aspect of Chachapoya belief systems that we do know more about is their attitude to death. Kuelap's inhabitants liked to keep their ancestors close. There are tombs everywhere: in the walls, under the houses, built into the cliff face. Narvaez has suggested that many of the dead were brought by pilgrims from remote tribes, making Kuelap, with all these ancestors to protect the living, a place of immense sacred power.

Nearby, *purunmachus* glare out of mountainsides: human-shaped capsules made of clay, sticks and stones, each with a mummy inside, wrapped in the fœtal position. Other Chachapoyas valleys hide tombs that cling to rock faces like swallows' nests. Both forms of burial involved extraordinarily brave and skilled engineering, manœuvring building materials onto tiny shelves high up crumbling cliffs. In a further feat of ingenuity, by placing the mummies on ledges sheltered by overhangs, they were preserved – despite all the rain – in a dry and cold microclimate.

Like other Andean peoples, the Chachapoya kept up a relationship with their ancestors, bringing them offerings of food and drink, consulting with them, and taking them out of their tombs for important rituals and festivities.[6] This was important, as they expected the ancestors to intercede with the gods, ensuring the fertility of the land. To empower them in these dealings, the dead were buried in sacred places, or *huacas*. *Huacas*, greatly revered all across the Andes, could be mountains, caves, lakes, rocks, or the meeting of rivers, and often embodied ancient spirits; some were venerated as places of origin, and tombs would be placed so that they could watch over both their living descendants and the birthplace of their ancestors.



JEN OGILVIE

ABOVE: Purunmachus in a cliff at Karajia.

The destruction of this people, when it came, was swift, terrible and complete; their art and iconography were destroyed and even their language was obliterated. The divided Chachapoya were defeated by Inca Tupac Yupanqui around 1475 (although Kuelap, oddly, is missing from the list of his conquests), but rebelled repeatedly against his successors. For their part, the Inca fought repeatedly to subdue this unruly people, who controlled one of South America's most important crossroads. So determined were the Inca that they summarily executed many Chachapoya warriors and deported half the population to other parts of the empire, importing colonists from elsewhere in their stead.

Chachapoya culture, then, was already in collapse by the time the Spanish – source of our earliest historical documents for the area – arrived. Initially, the Chachapoya welcomed the Spanish as allies against the Inca. Events didn't turn out as they'd hoped. The Europeans brought diseases against which they had no immunity: by 1600, it has been estimated, as much as 92 per cent of a population that once probably exceeded 300,000 had been wiped out. It was genocide on a terrifying scale; and, Professor Church adds, "an *enormous* amount of lost memory… a permanent loss of 'history', as far as we are concerned".[7]

Those few Chachapoya who did survive were forced to pay tribute for which they received nothing in exchange; the chiefs lost their power and the *ayllus* their best farmland; and many communities – already shuffled into new administrative units and given new hierarchies by the Inca – were moved out of their traditional settlements and away from their ancestors, and muddled together in new Christian colonial towns. The rebellious Manco Inka had supporters among some of the Chachapoya, and in 1538, according to his son, he set off for a "fine fortress" in their territory from which he planned to lead the fight against the Spanish (he later changed his mind and headed instead to Vilcabamba); the historian John Hemming has argued that this fine fortress was Kuelap, although others have pointed out Kuelap's impracticalities as a focus for revolt.[8] Many of the Chachapoya did rise up in support of Manco, but they were defeated by those Chachapoya who remained loyal to the Spanish, and their leaders burnt alive.

There's no evidence of a pitched battle against the Spanish at Kuelap, but large clumps of burnt roof thatch suggest that the inhabitants were either forced to leave, and set fire to their houses as they went, or that Kuelap came to a violent end – probably caught up in the internecine conflict that followed the Spanish arrival. In an archæological investigation followed by a TV documentary crew,[9] the remains of over 80 Chachapoya were found in an area around the Tintero, not buried but sprawled where they fell. Researchers concluded that the dead were the citadel's last inhabitants: Kuelap was a place of great spiritual importance, and those who lived there had responsibility for the wellbeing of the outlying tribes; when war and disease decimated the population Kuelap's custodians were blamed and murdered by their neighbours. The event, speculated the programme, inspired a local myth about a sorcerer who leapt from mountaintop to mountaintop, clubbing people to death.

Parts of the citadel were later reoccupied, and dark angular Inca walls squat among Kuelap's airy ruins. But, apart from the odd family who eked out a living amid the rubble, it was soon forgotten. Like sites throughout Chachapoyas, it has been damaged and looted and vandalised. The race is on to find out as much as possible about this enigmatic people before the clues are destroyed for good.

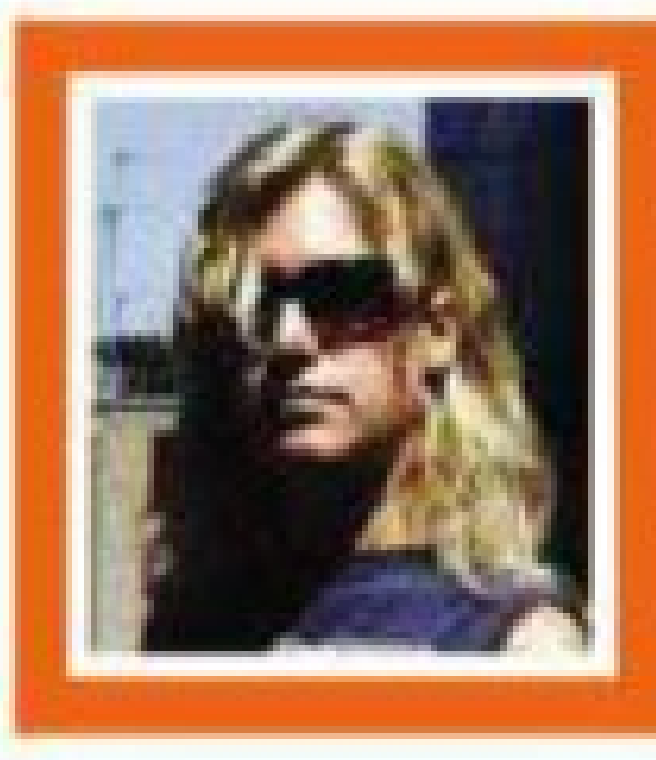
We're left alone on the ridge, tiny in the shadow of the massive wall and a lost civilisation. Kuelap has an incredible empty power and presence; the buildings may be echoes of what they once were, but the ancestors are all around us. FT

With thanks to Professor Warren Church

Further reading

Warren B Church & Adriana von Hagen: 'Chachapoyas: Cultural Development at an Andean Cloud Forest Crossroads', in *Handbook of South American Archæeology*, ed Helaine Silverman and William H Isbell, Springer, 2008, pp903–926.

Keith Muscutt: *Warriors of the Clouds: A Lost Civilization in the Upper Amazon of Peru*, University of New Mexico Press, 1998.



JEN OGILVIE spent six years working on *FT* before leaving to seek her fortune in Cambodia. You can follow her adventures at www.jenogi.com/

NOTES

[1] Reports of the fair skin and unusual height led explorer Gene Savoy to argue that the Chachapoya were descended from Europeans who sailed across the Atlantic and up the Amazon. Recent analyses of skeletal remains, however, indicate that they were of Andean stock.

[2] Prof. Warren B Church: 'Chachapoya Indians', in *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, vol 2, Sage Publications 2006, pp469–475.

[3] Adriana von Hagen: *An Overview of Chachapoya Archaeology and History*, p6; downloadable as PDF from museoleymebamba.org.

[4] Prof. Warren Church, pers. comm., 6 July 2011.

[5] James McGraw, *et al*: "Kuelap: A Solar Observatory?", *San Diego Museum of Man Ethnic Technology Notes* 24, 1996.

[6] The Inca royal mummies kept their own palaces, where they were served as they had been in life. They paid social calls, held dances, gave toasts, paraded around the countryside, and took part in ceremonies.

[7] Prof. Warren Church, pers. comm., 6 July 2011.

[8] von Hagen, *op. cit.*, p28.

[9] *The Ancient Skeletons of Peru*, shown on More4, 14 May 2011.

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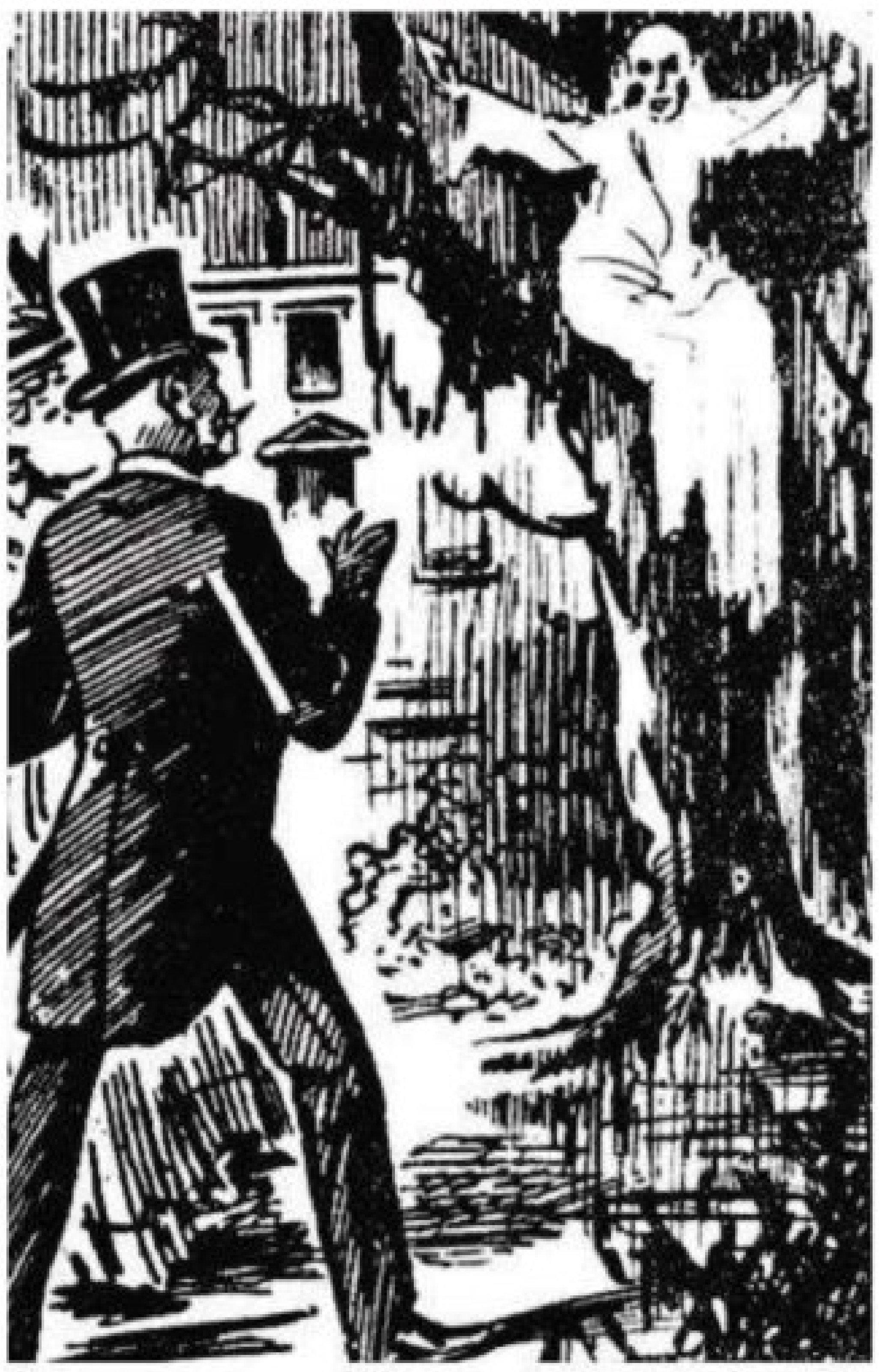
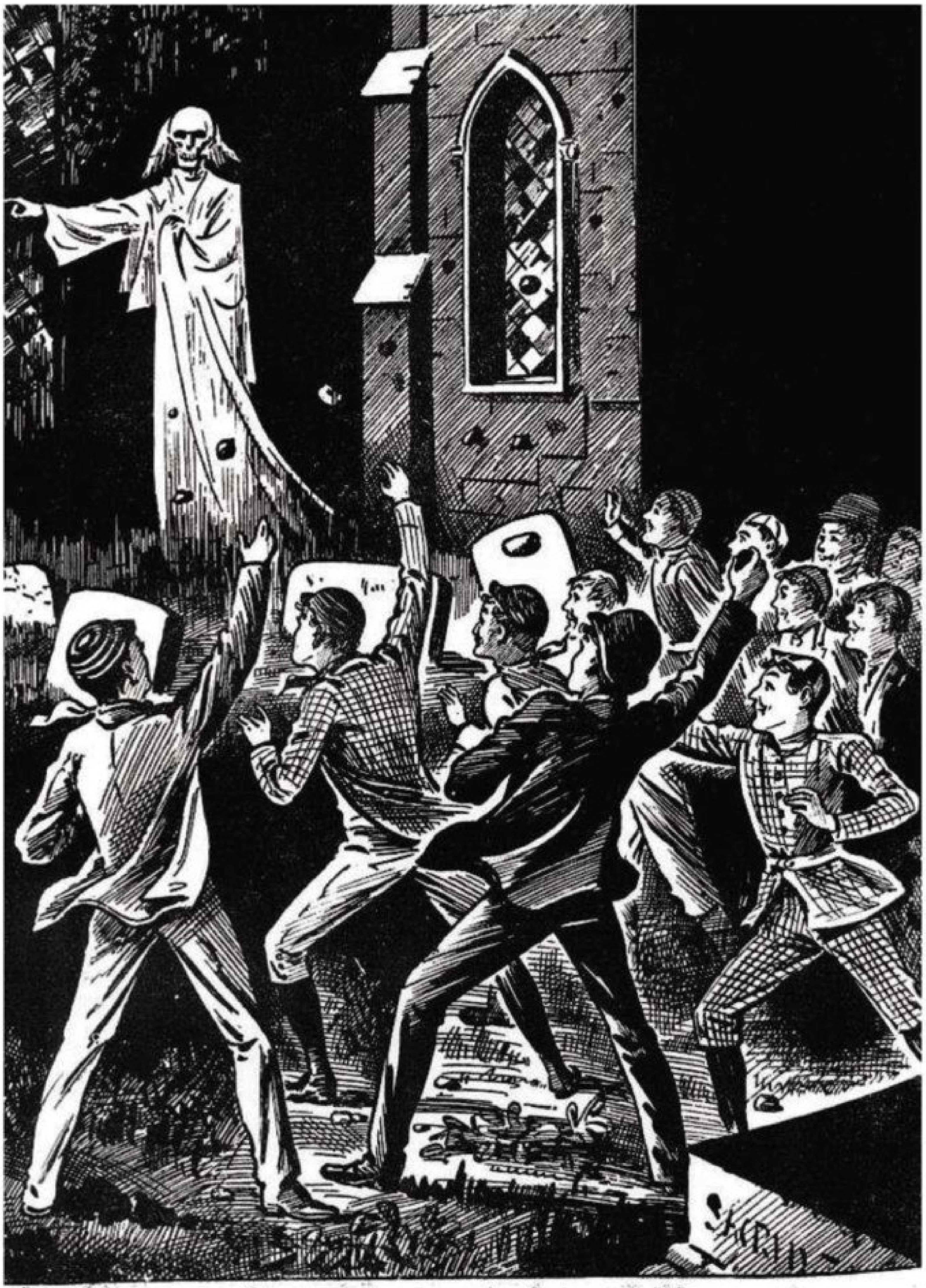
7. THE PLUMSTEAD GHOST





A GHOST APPEARS NEAR WOOLWICH.
SCHOOLBOYS ENJOY THE SPORT OF PELTING IT.

In 1897, many people saw a ghost flitting about near St James's Church and school, Plumstead, south-east London. Sensitive little girls had fainted dead away when the white spectre approached them; some were still in bed, said the *Daily News* of 29 October, suffering from nervous exhaustion. A timid schoolmaster had been frightened out of his wits when the Plumstead Ghost suddenly grabbed hold of him from behind and shouted 'Boo-hah!' at the top of its voice. An old couple visiting the churchyard received a similar shock when the ghost hailed them from a tree, making use of the same uncouth outcry.

When another schoolmaster was taking an evening walk, he heard rustling in the hedges nearby, and a shout of 'Boo-hah!' He had brought with him a large Newfoundland dog, which he set on the spectre. Since the master distinctly heard the ghost give a yelp when the dog's fangs made contact with its buttocks, he became convinced that the Plumstead Ghost was flesh and blood. He spoke to both masters and schoolboys, asking them not to be fearful, but to teach the ghost a hard lesson if they came across it.

The rowdy schoolboys decided to do just that. One evening, after scouts had reported that the ghost was at large, a troop of schoolboys, a hundred strong, stormed the churchyard. Shouting and yahooing, they pelted the ghost with stones, but without scoring any hits on the absconding spectre. Instead, their missiles broke some valuable stained glass. Pursued by the Newfoundland dog, which had belatedly been brought into the action, the ghost was seen to disappear into the hedges.

Since the schoolboys had been so very rowdy, the police arrested two of the ringleaders and brought them to Woolwich, but after the masters had explained the extraordinary circumstances of their riot, they were both discharged. The following evening, the Plumstead Ghost was seen in the grounds of Mr JR Jolly, JP. Arrayed in white attire, and wearing some kind of grotesque mask, the spectre was sitting in a tree, shouting its usual 'Boo-hah!' to frighten some female domestic servants. Mr Jolly was not at all amused: he sent for the police and the ghost was arrested. It turned out that the spectre's white garb had been torn, and his buttocks badly bruised, from his two encounters with the fierce Newfoundland dog. He turned out to be a local engineer, whose mind had become unhinged after he had lost a good deal of money in litigation. The friends of this unbalanced engineer made sure he was put under restraint in an asylum, and the Plumstead Ghost was laid.

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Letters

Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. Send to PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP, UK or email sieveking@forteantimes.com. We reserve the right to edit submissions.

Books & periodicals for review

Send to: Reviews Editor, Fortean Times, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD, UK. Send DVDs and games to the Editor, as above.

Caveat

FT aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. *FT* can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

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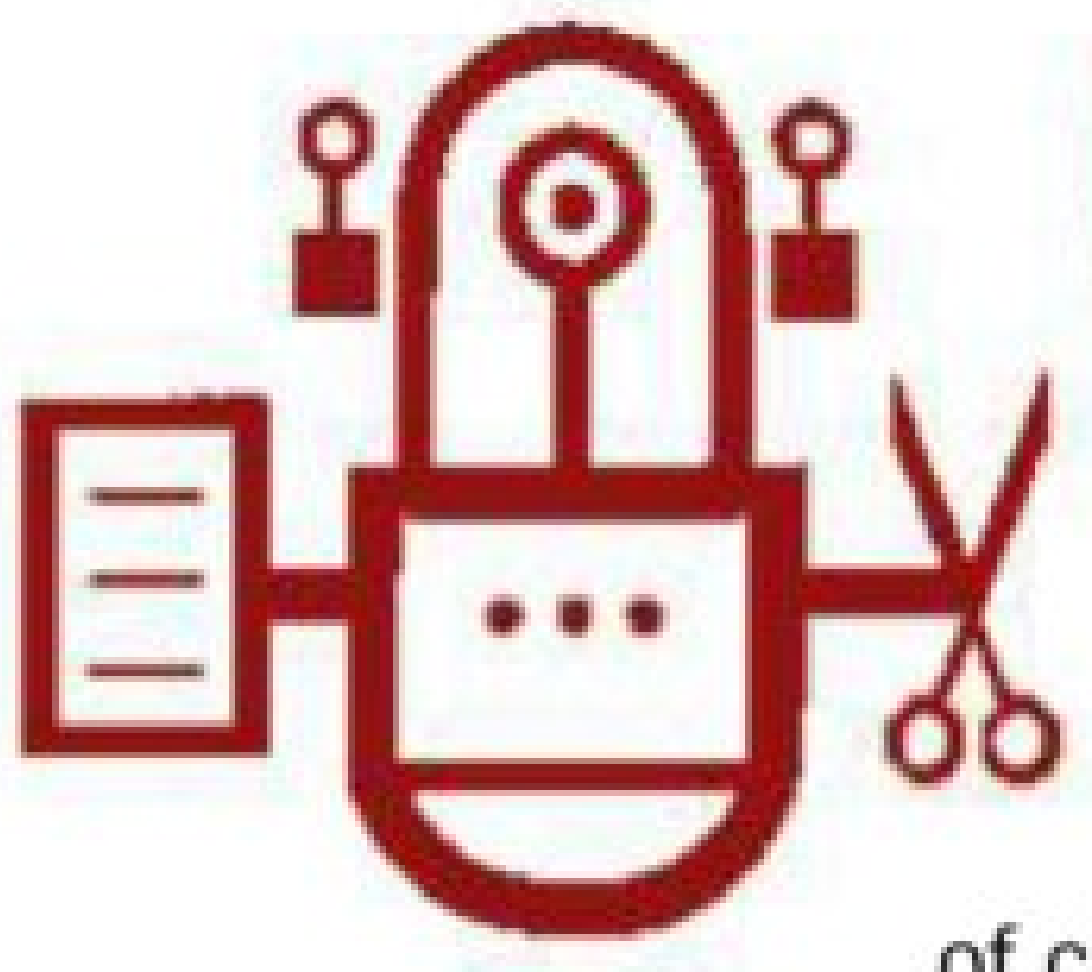

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 Oct 2011. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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AUSTRALIA Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld). **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC). **CYBERSPACE** Richard Alexander, John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Neil L Inglis, Michael Newton, Steve Scanlon. **ENGLAND** Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Alexis Lykiard, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Valerie Martin, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Nick Warren, Bobby Zodiac. **FINLAND** Heather Fowler. **FRANCE** Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Ulrich Magin, Cliff Wren. **HOLLAND** Robin Pascoe. **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Andrew Munro. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall. **ROMANIA** Iosif Boczor. **SCOTLAND** Roger Musson, Leslie John Thomson. **SWEDEN** Sven Rosén. **THAILAND** Chris Williams. **TURKEY** Izzet Goksu. **USA** Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Dolores Phelps (TX), Jim Riecken (NY), Ron Rosenblatt (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA), Gary Yates (UT). **WALES** Janet & Colin Bord.

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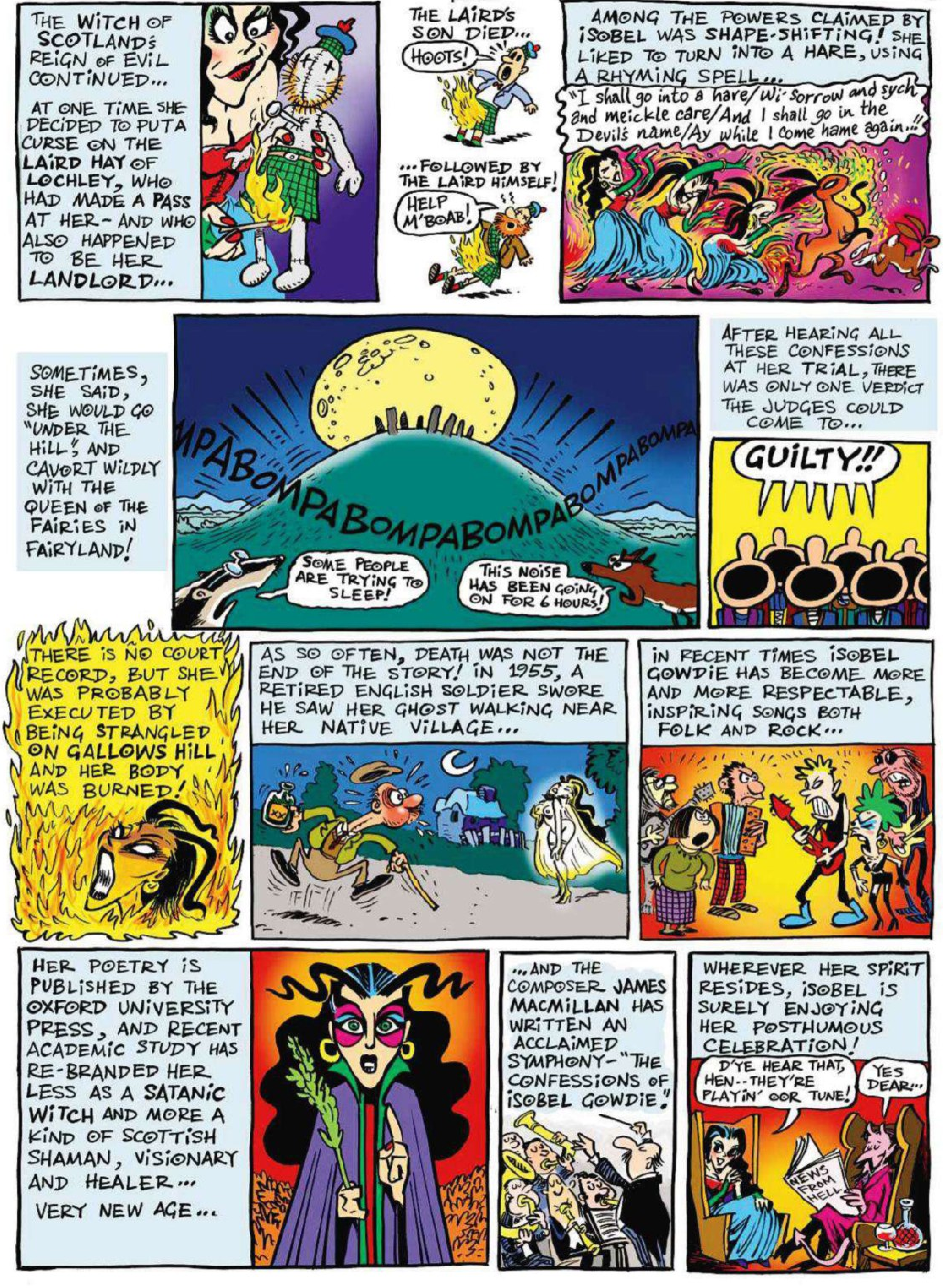
PHENOMENOMIX ISOBEL GOWDIE

part 2

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON


THE WITCH OF SCOTLAND'S REIGN OF EVIL CONTINUED...
AT ONE TIME SHE DECIDED TO PUT A CURSE ON THE LAIRD HAY OF LOCHLEY, WHO HAD MADE A PASS AT HER - AND WHO ALSO HAPPENED TO BE HER LANDLORD...
THE LAIRD'S SON DIED...
HOOTS!
...FOLLOWED BY THE LAIRD HIMSELF!
HELP M'BOAB!
AMONG THE POWERS CLAIMED BY ISOBEL WAS SHAPE-SHIFTING! SHE LIKED TO TURN INTO A HARE, USING A RHYMING SPELL...
"I shall go into a hare/ Wi' sorrow and sych and meickle care/ And I shall go in the Devil's name/ Ay while I come hame again..!"
SOMETIMES, SHE SAID, SHE WOULD GO "UNDER THE HILL", AND CAVORT WILDLY WITH THE QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES IN FAIRYLAND!
MPABOMPABOMPABOMPABOMPABOMPABOMPABOMPA
SOME PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO SLEEP!
THIS NOISE HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR 6 HOURS!
AFTER HEARING ALL THESE CONFESSIONS AT HER TRIAL, THERE WAS ONLY ONE VERDICT THE JUDGES COULD COME TO...
GUILTY!!
THERE IS NO COURT RECORD, BUT SHE WAS PROBABLY EXECUTED BY BEING STRANGLED ON GALLOWS HILL AND HER BODY WAS BURNED!
AS SO OFTEN, DEATH WAS NOT THE END OF THE STORY! IN 1955, A RETIRED ENGLISH SOLDIER SWORE HE SAW HER GHOST WALKING NEAR HER NATIVE VILLAGE...
XXX
IN RECENT TIMES ISOBEL GOWDIE HAS BECOME MORE AND MORE RESPECTABLE, INSPIRING SONGS BOTH FOLK AND ROCK...
HER POETRY IS PUBLISHED BY THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, AND RECENT ACADEMIC STUDY HAS RE-BRANDED HER LESS AS A SATANIC WITCH AND MORE A KIND OF SCOTTISH SHAMAN, VISIONARY AND HEALER...
VERY NEW AGE...
...AND THE COMPOSER JAMES MACMILLAN HAS WRITTEN AN ACCLAIMED SYMPHONY - "THE CONFESSIONS OF ISOBEL GOWDIE."
WHEREVER HER SPIRIT RESIDES, ISOBEL IS SURELY ENJOYING HER POSTHUMOUS CELEBRATION!
D'YE HEAR THAT, HEN -- THEY'RE PLAYIN' OOR TUNE!
YES DEAR...
NEWS FROM HELL

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

NOVEMBER 1981

This month, Derek Mahoney, an amateur archæologist, was dredging a pond in the grounds of Forty Hall, Enfield, when he found an old lead cross, nearly 7in (18cm) long. When the story appeared in a local paper, Enfield Council claimed it as their property. It bore a Latin inscription to the effect "Here lies buried the famous King Arthur in the Isle of Avalon" and seemed to be the cross of historical record that was said to have been buried long ago with the legendary king at Glastonbury. It was exhumed in the 12th century, but re-buried and has occasionally surfaced since then. It is supposed to grant the owner magical powers.

Enfield Council took the dispute to court and when Mahoney refused to hand it over – "I have the power and the authority," he claimed – he was jailed for two years. He was released on appeal in March 1982 and kept secret the location of where he had buried the cross, except to allow the British Museum to make a quick but indeterminate assessment. Scholarly opinion regarded both the original account of the Glastonbury monks and Mahoney's claims with increasing suspicion. With continuing money problems and failing health, Mahoney took his own life in 1989 and the whereabouts of the cross died with him. **FT52:19–20**

NOVEMBER 1991

While the BVM visions at Medjugorje were celebrating their 10th anniversary, the bizarre psychological war in Croatia was also hotting up. First we heard that Croats in the town of Osijek had freed tigers from the local zoo to roam the countryside and dine on Chetnik (Serbian) guerrilla fighters. Then Zagreb radio hit back with the news that canisters had been dropped by Yugoslavian planes around the eastern Croatian town of Daruvar to release "large quantities of yellow-backed spiders". A news agency in Belgrade reported that "mysterious cobwebs" had been spotted all over Croatia, but these were due to an artificial polymer designed to confuse Croatian air defences. The head of the Croatian medical service attempted to calm anxieties by pointing out that there were spiders everywhere at that time of year. **FT61:21**

The mediæval clerical tradition of stealing the holy relics from a rival monastery or cathedral is alive and well today. An apparent plot to steal the famous Turin Shroud was foiled this month when security officers discovered an unauthorised set of keys to the Shroud's protection. A month earlier, a reliquary containing the jaw of St Anthony of Padua was stolen from the town's cathedral; it was found in December in a warehouse near Rome's airport. **FT61:11**

NOVEMBER 2001

We continued to receive post-9/11 oddities; this month we learned that US intelligence agencies were recruiting psychics and remote-viewers to get the clairvoyant drop on future plots in the USA and the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden. Prudence Calabrese, whose company, Transdimensional Systems, employed 14 remote viewers, confirmed to reporters that she had been asked by the FBI to predict likely targets for terrorist attacks. The FBI refused to comment, but said that agents had been told "to think outside the box". Two former members of the 'Stargate Project' – the Stamford Research Institute team of remote-viewers that was shut down in 1995 – said they too had been approached. It sounds like a plot from *Fringe*. **FT154:7**

In time for All Saints' Day, the state of Massachusetts passed a bill officially exonerating five women hanged as witches in Salem in the 17th century. A total of 20 men and women were hanged on Gallows Hill in 1692, after dramatic trials in which hysterical girls were encouraged to accuse their elders, and their unsupported 'evidence' (including dreams, anxieties and gossip) was accepted at 'truth'. Many descendents of those victims had worked for years towards a pardon for their ancestors, including Shari Worrell, an eight times great-granddaughter of Susannah Martin, one of the five in the latest pardon. **FT149:22; 155:14**

A long-lost film purporting to show the Loch Ness Monster turned up, to the delight of Nessie watchers and historians. Last shown in November 1936, *The Loch Ness Monster: Proof at Last!* was made by Malcolm Irvine that September, and was rediscovered in the archives of the Scottish Film Council during cataloguing and shown this month on BBC TV, almost exactly 65 years later. It contains eyewitness testimony and Irvine's own film of a 30ft (9m)-long shiny, black, streamlined shape cruising just below the surface, which is disturbed by its movement. Despite what Constance Whyte (author of the 1951 book *The Loch Ness Monster*) refers to as rumours of a "mechanical device", this rare footage is a wonderful find. **FT156:6**

COMING NEXT MONTH

SAY "WURST!"

THE AMAZING CAREER OF DON, THE GERMAN-SPEAKING DOG

TOOTH & CLAW

BRITAIN'S MYSTERY BIG CATS: THE LATEST ENCOUNTERS

+

BICYCLING FROGS, STOMACH SNAKES, AQUATIC ODDITIES AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 282

ON SALE 10 NOVEMBER

Write Your Way To A New Career!

Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-two Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

Hazel McHaffie

Tim Skelton

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-two years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

Students such as Tim Skelton. An engineer by profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. In 2005 I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to Luxembourg. I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

> *"My writing career took off exponentially."*

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2008. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

These are just a selection from the inspirational true stories from students of The Writers Bureau. There's no reason why YOU couldn't be their next success story. With a 15-day free trial and money-back guarantee, there is nothing to lose and potentially a whole new career to gain! So why not visit their website at www.writersbureau.com or call on Freephone 0800 856 2008 for more information?

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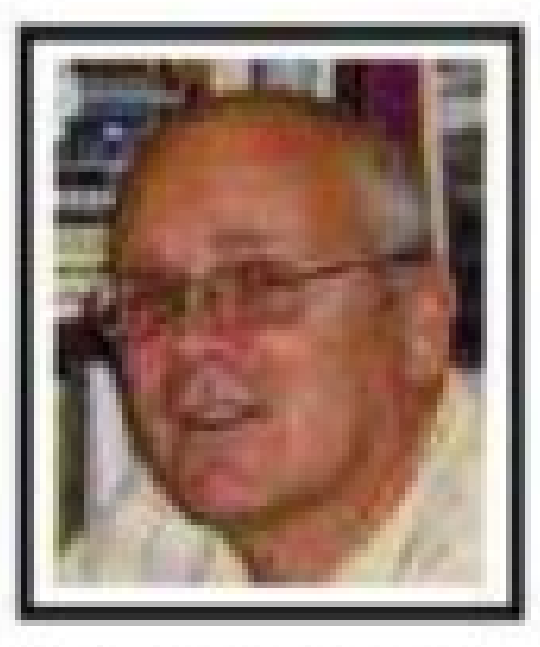

Michael Foley, Essex
"Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. By the end of this year I should have eight books already published and hopefully two more finished."

Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent
"I thought you'd like to know that seven years since doing my course at WB I've been published in more than 150 magazines around the world. I've now got to the stage where I'm turning down all-inclusive exotic press trips!"

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